Fourth-quarter surge powers Cassopolis boys past Bangor
Page B1

Stay Safe

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Today's The Herald-Palladium included inside

Niles Star

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ALR Educational Services opens Buchanan campus

By DEBRA HAIGHT
For Leader Publications

BUCHANAN — Buchanan city officials will tell you that the city is on the verge of a renaissance and one sign of that renewal took place Friday afternoon with the opening of the new ALR Educational Services Buchanan campus in the former Stark Elementary School.

Stark has been vacant for more than a decade after Buchanan schools downsized. The building is located at 502 Claremont St. in the Liberty Heights section of the city.

ALR Founder Dr. Ayanna Redding was joined at the ribbon cutting and open house by city officials and community members along with current and former ALR students. Redding bought the school building in August and has been renovating it since then to house a variety of health professions classes.

Buchanan Mayor Mark Weedon thanked Redding for choosing Buchanan as the location for the second ALR campus and noted that his wife is an instructor with ALR.

"ALR is coming in from Niles to open a second campus here in this historic building," he said. "I'm over the moon about ALR coming here. Stark School means a lot to this community and

See **ALR**, page A6

Maxwell Harden / For Leader Publications
ALR Educational Services' Buchanan campus opened Friday in the former Stark Elementary School.

Maxwell Harden / Leader Publications
Isaac Saylor (back row, middle) and members of the Saylor's Pizza Port team pose for a photo outside of the building.

History in the 'baking'

Saylor's Pizza Port reopens in Niles

By MAXWELL HARDEN
max.harden@leaderpub.com

NILES — A longtime Niles staple has risen from the ashes to serve the same pizza pies patrons know and love at a new location.

Saylor's Pizza Port, 322 Grant St., Niles reopened its doors Tuesday more than a year after a devastating fire destroyed the original Lincoln Street building. Owner Isaac Saylor has spent more than a year renovating the former Dairy Queen building into a pizza parlor and is excited to get back to work.

"It feels good to be done with construction and start making pizza again," Saylor said.

The pizza parlor will be open from 2 to 9 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and will feature the same menu patrons are familiar with.

"There might be a thing or two we don't have when we first open because some items are special order only," Saylor said.

The previous Saylor's building was destroyed in September 2024 after a suspect who fled a traffic stop crashed into the restaurant, starting a fire. The building was then razed with only an empty lot remaining.

"It was just weird, especially now that the building is completely down and it's just an empty parking lot," Saylor said. "My dad owned it and I worked there ever since I was a little kid."

While the loss of the business was devastating, Saylor and his family wanted to rebuild. According to Saylor, a tip from a longtime customer helped the pizza parlor find its new location.

"Mayor Nick Shelton knew about it and got us in contact with the guy who was selling it," he said.

Saylor said construction has taken more than a year to complete due to contractor demand.

"That has been the cause of some of the delay," he said. "You have to wait until they have time to do it and everyone has been really busy."

Saylor's has been a popular pizza destination in southwest Michigan for years. For Saylor, the community's response to the business' return has been overwhelming.

"People stop by all the time while we're here working," he said. "People like that we're going to get opened back up."

Saylor looks forward to welcoming the Niles community to the new Saylor's Pizza Port.

"Getting to see all of our longtime customers who have supported us this whole time will be great," he said. "It will be nice to see them again."

Low Family Foundation awards $250,000 in grants

SUBMITTED

NILES — The Joseph N. & Rosemary E. Low Family Foundation awarded $250,000 in grants to expand opportunities and support critical needs throughout Berrien County and beyond. The Low Family Foundation is a newly established family foundation fund of the Berrien Community Foundation.

The Low Family Foundation awarded 22 grants to organizations that align with the values and interests of the Low Family Foundation's founders: Joseph, Wilma and Rosemary Low. They were born and raised in the greater Niles area. New to the foundation giving were $5,000 We See You Grants to recognize and support the work of nonprofit organizations.

"Last year was the first time the Low Family Foundation awarded We See You Grants," said Dr. John N. Low, chair of the Low Family Foundation, and son of Joseph and Wilma. "We are particularly excited to recognize and highlight all the institutions in and around Berrien County that are dedicated to addressing the physical, cultural and spiritual needs of our area. We hope that with recognition, the support of these fine organizations will continue to grow."

The Low Foundation awarded We See You Grants to the following llocal organizations:

- Brandywine Community Schools (Keeping Our Bobcats Warm This Winter program), Niles
- Ferry Street Resource Center (food pantry), Niles
- Meals on Wheels (meals for clients in southern Berrien County), Niles
- Mount Calvary Baptist Church (food pantry), Niles
- Redbud Area Ministries (food pantry, display racks, client financial assistance), Buchanan
- Roti Roti Art Center (general support), Buchanan

"The Low family's decision to bring their charitable work to Berrien Community Foundation speaks to their deep commitment to the people of Berrien County," said BCF President Lisa Cripps-Downey. "The grants they're making are already strengthening organizations that reflect the values of the Low family. We are honored to help ensure their generosity continues creating meaningful impact across our community."

In addition to We See You Grants, LFF awarded a $50,000 major general-support grants to Fernwood Botanical Garden.

"Fernwood appreciates the ongoing support from the Low Family Foundation," said Mary Krinock, executive director of Fernwood. "Their contributions to the community and specifically to Fernwood play a significant role in enabling our work at the garden. This generous donation will enhance our educational and horticultural programs and support the garden's overall operations."

By partnering with Berrien Community Foundation, the Low Family Foundation ensures its charitable mission will endure for generations. BCF provides administrative support, philanthropic expertise and deep knowledge of local needs as part of its leadership in managing more than $120 million in charitable assets on behalf of the community.

Candious Clabin, a Benton Harbor mother who is seven months pregnant, attends a news conference Wednesday at the Berrien County Health Department to announce the expansion of Rx Kids to the communities of Benton Harbor, Niles, Buchanan and Benton Township.
Don Campbell / HP staff

Rx Kids expands in Southwest Michigan

Initiative helps support parents with newborns

By LOUISE WREGE
PMG Staff Writer

BENTON TOWNSHIP — Helping women have healthier babies not only makes their families stronger, but saves millions of dollars in health care costs and stimulates local economies, according to Berrien County Health Officer Guy Miller.

Miller spoke Wednesday during the rollout of Rx Kids, the nation's first community-wide prenatal and infant cash prescription program, which is expanding to include the cities of Benton Harbor, Buchanan and Niles, as well as Benton Township.

"These four communities have some of the highest maternal and child health needs in Berrien County, representing real families with real challenges," Miller said during a news conference Wednesday in the Berrien County Conference Room at the Berrien County Health Department in Benton Township. "We have the responsibility, all of us as community members as well as the health department, to change that."

See **RX KIDS**, page A3

Today's obituaries • Page A3

Steve Moragne, Jacob Holdeman, Kasey Dool, Kimberly Mathews, Tim Skalla, Christine Converse, Betty Bridgewater, Wilda Vanlue, Claire Wiggins

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FRANKLY

Tips and quips

What is Frankly? It is where readers sound off on issues of the day. Have a tip or a quip? Call Frankly at 269-687-7700 or email rich.cains@leaderpub.com.

■ If you really want to make America great again, stop rewarding bad behavior.

■ I wish all restaurants were handicapped accessible.

■ What good is Congress if the President can do whatever he wants foreign and domestically?

■ Stop it with data centers! They are not wanted or needed in this state or our small towns. We need more jobs for people not AI taking jobs from people along with our natural resources.

■ Overtake a country, seize assets, arrest a president and still manage to get 18 holes in. All in a days work.

■ Be happy in 2026!

Illinois man injured in Silver Creek crash

An Illinois man was injured Wednesday in a single-vehicle crash in Silver Creek Township, according to the Cass County Sheriff's Office.

Deputies responded to a single vehicle crash near the intersection of Burke St and Middle Crossing in Silver Creek Township. At approximately 7 p.m. Wednesday, 44-year-old Palos Hills, Illinois resident Thaer Alzubdeh did not negotiate the sharp curve in Burke Street just south of Middle Crossing. His vehicle landed forcefully when it exited the roadway.

SMCAS Ambulance and Indian Lake Fire Department provided medical care at the scene before transporting Alzubdeh to Corewell Hospital-Saint Joseph for non-life threatening injuries. The Pokagon Tribal Police Department assisted the Sheriff's Office with the crash, which is under investigation.

LMC offering extended education in first half of 2026

By PMG STAFF

BENTON TOWNSHIP — Lake Michigan College's Extended Education program is offering a lineup of classes throughout the first half of 2026 designed for career advancement, skill building and personal enrichment.

According to a news release from LMC, the 2026 spring schedule provides opportunities for learners of all backgrounds and interests. Classes are offered with flexible scheduling options including evenings, intensive one-day formats, and online delivery.

CDL-A trucking

Multiple sessions starting Feb. 9 and 23, March 9 and 23, April 13 and 27 at the LMC South Haven Campus.

Three-week training program with classroom/at-home study and two weeks of behind-the-wheel training in LMC's semis. Prepares students for commercial learner permit and hands-on driving skills.

Certified nurse aide

Jan. 27-March 13 at the Allegan Tech Center; March 31-May 15 at the South Haven Campus; and April 28-June 12 at the Allegan Tech Center.

The 98-hour, state-approved program qualifying students for the Michigan CNA Exam. Maximum eight students per class with mandatory daily attendance.

Conversational French

5:30-7 p.m. on Mondays from Feb. 2-March 23 at the Hanson Tech Center, LMC Benton Harbor Campus.

In-person conversational French course for all levels with immersive language and culture activities guided by experienced instructors.

Marine maintenance technician

Feb. 2-March 18, days and times vary at the virtual and LMC South Haven Campus.

Seven-week program combining online coursework with hands-on training to become an inboard and outboard engine technician. Includes OSHA 10, first aid and CPR/AED certifications.

English as a Second Language

Feb. 2-April 21 at the LMC Benton Harbor Campus.

Participants choose from basic, beginner, intermediate and advanced ESL classes providing American English language and culture instruction to prepare for college or employment.

Energy in motion

5:30-7 p.m. on Wednesdays from Feb. 4-April 1 at the LMC Benton Harbor Campus.

Journey into Chinese healing and martial arts traditions with Qigong practice and Taiji movements for health, balance and inner strength.

Financial literacy workshop

5-6:30 p.m. Feb. 11 at the Todd Center, LMC Benton Harbor Campus

Learn about tax types, basic terminology, common issues, where tax dollars go, and why working with a trusted tax professional matters.

Practical project management

9 a.m. to noon on Feb. 16, or 1-4 p.m. May 4 at the LMC Benton Harbor Campus.

Half-day workshop on building collaborative teams and effective communication strategies. Gain hands-on experience with communication plans and team charters, plus essential templates.

Professional and soft skills bootcamp

9 a.m.-4 p.m. Feb. 23 or April 20 at the Todd Center, LMC Benton Harbor Campus.

One-day certification program focusing on communication, time management and interpersonal skills for career advancement. Includes lunch and certificate of completion.

Sales mastery bootcamp

9 a.m.-4 p.m. March 2 at the Todd Center, LMC Benton Harbor Campus.

Intensive hands-on bootcamp led by sales strategist Brent Curtis covering relationship building, customer relationships, objection handling and strategic sales tactics.

AI mastery bootcamp

9 a.m.–3:30 p.m. March 16 at the Todd Center, LMC Benton Harbor Campus.

Interactive bootcamp on using AI strategically to compress time, maintain authentic voice, and replace busywork with breakthroughs. Leave with customized prompt frameworks and your own AI playbook.

Financial literacy workshop

5-6:30 p.m. March 18 at the Todd Center, LMC Benton Harbor Campus.

Understand credit history and scoring systems, learn tips for maintaining good credit, and develop a personal plan to stay on top of your credit profile.

Basic life support provider CPR training

Multiple sessions held March 21, April 8 and 18, July 15 and 29, Aug. 6, 15 and 27 the the LMC Benton Harbor Campus.

A four-hour CPR course for health care professionals with an American Heart Certification issued upon completion.

Simple personal finances

10-11:30 a.m. March 21 at the Hanson Tech Center, LMC Benton Harbor Campus.

Interactive 90-minute workshop covering strategic budget development, investment fundamentals, financial prioritization and risk prevention with personalized planning exercises.

Practical project management

9 a.m.-4 p.m. March 23 or May 11 at the Todd Center, LMC Benton Harbor Campus.

Intensive course exploring practical project management strategies using PMBOK framework. Includes essential templates and take-home tools.

Practical project management

9 a.m.-4 p.m. March 30 at the Todd Center, LMC Benton Harbor Campus.

One-day workshop on transforming plans into actionable schedules. Gain hands-on experience with Gantt charts, critical path method and milestone lists, plus ready-to-use templates.

Financial literacy workshop

5-6:30 p.m. April 8 at the LMC Benton Harbor Campus.

Learn strategies for reviewing credit reports, addressing errors, and taking action steps to repair credit history and improve credit scores.

AI-enhanced business communications

9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. April 13 at the Todd Center, LMC Benton Harbor Campus.

Learn practical AI applications for drafting, editing, and refining business communications. Leave with customized prompts, an AI editing checklist, and workflows for sharper, faster writing.

Practical project management

9 a.m.-4 p.m. April 27 at the Todd Center, LMC Benton Harbor Campus.

Workshop on identifying risks early and managing changes smoothly. Gain hands-on experience with risk registers, change request processes, and issue logs, plus practical templates.

Women in business

9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. May 11 at the Todd Center, LMC Benton Harbor Campus.

One-day bootcamp helping women communicate value clearly, advocate with credibility, and influence outcomes. Leave with a personalized Influence Action Plan and practical tools.

WEATHER

Saturday Night: Rain and snow showers likely, becoming all snow after 10 p.m. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 22. Chance of precipitation is 70 percent. New snow accumulation of around an inch possible.

Sunday: Snow showers likely, mainly before 1 p.m. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 31. Chance of precipitation is 60 percent.

Sunday Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 22.

Monday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 36.

Monday Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 29.

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OBITUARIES

Jacob Holdeman

March 2, 1980 – December 27, 2025

Jacob Randall Holdeman, 45, of Cassopolis, went home to be with his Savior, Saturday, December 27, 2025 in the comfort of his family's presence.

His life began March 2, 1980 in Goshen, Indiana, the middle of three children born to John and Janell Holdeman.

He married Nicole L. Mansfield August 1, 2009 in Elkhart, Indiana.

Jake was devoted to his young daughter and was quick to think of entertaining things to do with his nephews and nieces. He enjoyed backyard fires with family and friends, hard work around the homestead, and looking for and finding deals.

His own youth was filled with being active: running, bicycle riding, shooting with family and taking a shot at the Strongman competition at the Elkhart County 4-H Fair.

Jake's faith in his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was continually maturing thanks to many disciplers along his life's path. His faith is now made sight and he is healed of all pains and struggles of life. Jake will be greatly missed by family and friends.

He is survived by his beloved wife of sixteen years, Nicole Holdeman of Cassopolis; one daughter, Brielle Holdeman; beloved parents, John (Janell) Holdeman of Bristol, Indiana; two brothers, Jason (Cassandra) Holdeman of Jones, Joshua (Jamie) Holdeman of Elkhart, Indiana; five nieces, Kelsey (Kyle), Rebekah, Anya, Madison, Kalyssa; seven nephews, Caleb (Jocelyn), Jared, Landon, Boaz, Elek, Hudson, and Tancred; supportive in-laws, Joel (Melodie) Mansfield, LeAnna (Craig) Comstock of New Zealand; and Kara Mansfield.

He was preceded in death by his grandparents.

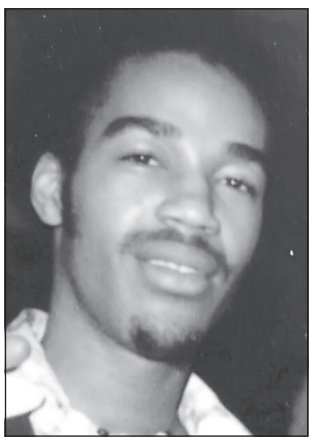
Family and friends will gather Friday, January 9, 2026 for a memorial service at 4:00 p.m. in Decatur Bible Church, 80797 M-51, in Decatur. Jake will be laid to rest in a private graveside service in Young's Prairie Cemetery in Cassopolis.

The family prefers contributions in memory of Jake be made to his wife and young daughter in care of Decatur Bible Church, 80797 M-51, Decatur, Michigan 49045. (269.423.5111)

Arrangements have been entrusted to Wagner Family Funerals Connelly Chapel, Cassopolis. Please share a memory or a message online: wagnercares.com.

Steve Moragne Sr.

October 9, 1956 – December 26, 2025



Mr. Steve Curtis Moragne, Sr., 69, of South Bend, Indiana, died Friday, December 26, 2025, at his home.

His life began in Evanston, Illinois, on October 9, 1956, to Adolf Moragne and Emma Norvelle Winters.

Steve retired from Elkhart Brass, where he dedicated many years of hard work and commitment.

Outside of work, he found great joy in fishing and had a deep love for all kinds of animals, including snakes. He always had a dog by his side, treating each one like a cherished member of the family.

Steve was also known as a very talented chef, often sharing his love through food, and he will be remembered for his beautiful, warm smile that could light up any room.

He married Deborah Sue Collins on June 21, 1975, in Cassopolis, Michigan. After thirty-six years of marriage, Deborah preceded him in death on April 27, 2012.

Steve will be greatly missed by family and friends. He is survived by two daughters, Charles Rae (Russell) White of Tacoma, Washington, and Dr. Candice (Daniel) Render of Dubai, United Arab Emirates; and one son, Steve Curtis Moragne, Jr. of South Bend, Indiana.

He also leaves to cherish his memory ten grandchildren: Ashley Collins of Tacoma, Washington; Kyle Collins and Kaylin Collins of Palmdale, California; Daniel James Render of Indianapolis, Indiana; Lovette Basnight Jr. of Grovetown, Georgia; Russell White of Tacoma, Washington; Isaiah Moragne of South Bend, Indiana; Kadin Render of Savannah, Georgia; Mackenzie Render of Irvine, California; and Landon Moragne of South Bend, Indiana.

Additionally, he is survived by three great-grandchildren: Romeo Collins and Taylor Collins of Palmdale, California, and Damien Basnight of Grovetown, Georgia; his brother, Dr. Sydney Moragne of Jackson, Tennessee; and a host of nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Adolf Moragne and Emma Norvelle Winters; his beloved wife, Deborah Moragne; and his stepmother, Willie Lee Gary.

Mr. Moragne will be laid to rest with his wife in Prospect Hill Cemetery, Cassopolis, on Monday, January 5, 2026, at 10:00 a.m.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Wagner Family Funerals Connelly Chapel, Cassopolis. Please share a memory or a message online at wagnercares.com.

Kasey Dool

January 12, 1979 – December 3, 2025

Kasey Michelle Dool, 46, of Cassopolis, passed away December 3, 2025.

Her life began January 12, 1979 in Niles, the first of five children.

Kasey graduated from Edwardsburg in 1998. She was known for her love of unicorns and her infectious laugh. Growing up, Kasey looked forward to church on Sundays with her grandma. A weekend with her family, spent going to garage sales would be her idea of a great time. As an avid movie watcher, Dirty Dancing was by far her favorite.

Kasey will be greatly missed by family and friends. She is survived by her mother, Lawra (Tom) Casey of Dowagiac; father, Scot (Kathy) Dool of Cassopolis; two sisters, Nichole (Rick) Drews of Vandalia, Ashley Casey of Elkhart; two brothers, Christopher (Hillary) Casey of Niles, Derek Dool of Cassopolis; one niece and four nephews.

She was preceded in death by her grandparents.

Family and friends will gather to celebrate Kasey's life Saturday, January 24, 2026 from 3:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m. in Lt. William E. Lozier VFW Post 10704, 131 South Broadway Street, Cassopolis.

The family prefers contributions in memory of Kasey be made to Lawra Jean Casey to offset her final expenses.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Wagner Family Funerals Connelly Chapel, Cassopolis. Please share a memory or a message online: wagnercares.com.

Kimberly Mathews

January 11, 1965 – December 29, 2025

Kimberly R. Mathews, 60, of Vandalia, died peacefully Monday, December 29, 2025 in her home.

Her life began January 11, 1965 in Elkhart, Indiana one of four children born to Donald Neff and Catherine Holcomb.

She married Stevan M. Mathews October 4, 2014 in Vandalia, Michigan.

Kim was a workaholic and a homebody. For the most part, she and Stevan enjoyed going to work and coming home to just be together.

Kim will be greatly missed by family and friends. She is survived by her husband, Stevan M. Mathews of Vandalia; daughter, Chelsea Mathews of Alabama; sons, Stevan Mathews, Tristan Mathews, both of Columbus, Ohio; brothers, Michael Neff of Ohio, and Wayne Neff of Michigan.

She was preceded in death by her parents and her sister, Karen Laws.

The family will observe a private remembrance.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Wagner Family Funerals Connelly Chapel, Cassopolis. Please share a memory or a message online: wagnercares.com.

Betty Bridgewater

Betty Jean Williamson Bridgewater, 82, passed away on Saturday, December 27, 2025, in Niles, Michigan. Arrangements have been entrusted to and are pending with Brown Funeral Home & Cremation Services.

Christine Converse

Christine Marie Converse, 67, of Niles, Michigan, passed away on January 3, 2026. Arrangements have been entrusted to Brown Funeral Home & Cremation Services.

Wilda Vanlue

Wilda Ermajean Vanlue, 85, of Niles, Michigan, passed away on December 29th, 2025. Arrangements have been entrusted to Brown Funeral Home & Cremation Services.

Claire Wiggins

Claire Ann Wiggins, 82, passed away on Thursday, January 1, 2026, in Mishawaka, Indiana. Arrangements have been entrusted to and are pending with Brown Funeral Home & Cremation Services.

William Skalla

William "Tim" Skalla, 73, of Niles, Michigan, passed away December 26, 2025. Visitation will be January 23, 2026 5-7pm. Services on January 24, 2026 at St. Mary Catholic Church, Niles, MI, followed by a committal service at Calvary Cemetery. Arrangements provided by Brown Funeral Home & Cremation Services.

Obituary Policy: Leader Publications publishes death notices at a cost of $15. Extended obituaries are priced based on character count. If there's an error because of a mistake made by the newspaper, the obituary will be reprinted at no charge. For more information, or to submit an obituary, email obits@leaderpub.com.

RX KIDS

From page A1

RxKids
A Prescription for Health, Hope, and Opportunity
Cash for Moms and Babies
BERRIEN COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
better health, stronger communities

Photos by Don Campbell / HP staff

Alyssa Stewart, director of Philanthropic Partnerships for Rx Kids, talks about the introduction of the new program during a news conference Wednesday at the Berrien County Conference Room at the Berrien County Health Department. Rx Kids, the first-ever community-wide prenatal and infant cash prescription program is expanding to the communities of Benton Harbor, Niles, Buchanan and Benton Township.

Starting at 9 a.m. Monday, women who are at least 16 weeks pregnant or gave birth on or after Jan. 1 can enroll in the program at RxKids.org. Participants in the public-private partnership will receive a one-time $1,500 payment during mid-pregnancy and $500 per month for the first six months of the baby's life.

Miller said communities already participating in Rx Kids have seen premature birth rates go down, fewer babies admitted to the neonatal intensive care unit and mothers with stronger mental health.

In addition, he said Rx Kids helps local businesses.

"In Flint, where the program began in the state of Michigan, our recent analysis has shown that the program is a meaningful economic driver, and the same will happen here in Benton Harbor," Miller said.

Benton Harbor resident Candious Clabin, who is seven months pregnant, said she and her fiancé will be first-time parents and she is thankful for Rx Kids.

"There are a lot of unexpected expenses that we are trying to prepare for, as well as keeping up with our house that we purchased," said Clabin, who is a nursing student and works in health care.

Alyssa Stewart, director of philanthropic partnerships for Rx Kids, said Dr. Mona Hanna, a pediatrician, started Rx Kids in 2024 because she saw babies born into deep poverty.

"As a pediatrician, she struggled, knowing that the things she was asking of them – to come to prenatal visits, to think about safe sleep, to eat healthy foods – were all tasks that were not possible because of systemic barriers and lack of financial resources," Stewart said.

Candious Clabin, a Benton Harbor mother who is seven months pregnant, talks about the benefits of the new Rx Kids program during a news conference Wednesday at the Berrien County Health Department. "There are a lot of unexpected expenses that we are trying to prepare for, as well as keeping up with our house that we purchased," Clabin said.

So, she said Hanna looked around the world and found that 70 percent of countries provide financial assistance to pregnant mothers because the prenatal period and the first year of life is "the poorest time in any family's life, regardless of their financial situation."

Not only do costs rise, but women often have to leave the workforce, work less or change jobs.

"Having a baby is expensive," Stewart said.

She said making this investment at this critical time in the lives of babies will improve their trajectory for the rest of their life.

Communities taking part in Rx Kids have shown a:

- 9.1 percent increase in adequate prenatal care.
- 5.6 percent increase in first-trimester care.
- 18 percent reduction in preterm births.
- 27 percent reduction in low-birthweight births.
- 29 percent reduction in NICU admissions.
- Reduced third-semester smoking.
- 14 percent reduction in postpartum depression.

Since the program started in Flint, it has reached nearly 5,000 families with more than $20 million in direct support.

Michigan lawmakers made a $250 million bipartisan investment in the 2025-26 state budget to expand the program.

To launch in the four communities in Berrien County, Rx Kids required $715,770 over three years to secure the philanthropic match necessary in the statewide expansion, with 70 percent already pledged.

Because of this, Berrien County is eligible to receive almost $2 million annually in state funds.

Rx Kids is led by Michigan State University and administered by GiveDirectly. The Berrien County Health Department will support outreach, engagement and celebratory efforts.

Besides the state, the initiative is supported by the Sam Fund at the Indianapolis Foundation, the Berrien Community Foundation and Corewell Health Lakeland. The Berrien Community Foundation will serve as local fiduciary and welcomes contributions to ensure the sustainability of the program in these Berrien County communities.

"At the Sam Fund, our core values are kindness, caring, freedom, along with personal and fiscal responsibility," said Alan Mussman, donor advisor for the Sam Fund at the Indianapolis Foundation, in a news release. "Rx Kids reflects all of these principles; it's a grand slam. As far as we're concerned, Rx Kids is great news for Berrien County. We all do better when we all do better."

Berrien Community Foundation President Lisa Cripps-Downey said her organization decided to support the program because it is backed by data.

"The program is shown to strengthen families and save money in the long run. We are making smart investments in healthy families," Cripps-Downey said in the release.

Contact: lwrege@TheHP.com, 932-0361, Twitter: @HPWrege

Area residents get probation for meth possession

By DEBRA HAIGHT
For Leader Publications

CASSOPOLIS — Three area residents were sentenced to probation for possession of methamphetamine Friday in Cass County Circuit Court.

Two of the three people sentenced for meth possession will have the chance to have their charges reduced to misdemeanor use of methamphetamine, while the third person will be able to stay out of jail or prison if she completes her probation successfully.

Tracie Skuza-Binkley, 42, of Lawton, pleaded guilty to possession of methamphetamine as a habitual offender and was sentenced to three years probation, credit for three days served and $3,128 in fines and costs.

The incident occurred May 30, 2025 in the parking lot of the Four Winds Casino outside of Dowagiac. Police were investigating a car emitting smoke from the engine and found Binkley inside the car asleep. When she got out of the car, they found a meth pipe as well as a small amount of meth on her.

BINKLEY

Defense attorney Robert Drake noted that Binkley's guidelines which called for prison without the agreement with the prosecutor's office were high because of her prior record. He said that Binkley has sought treatment in the past and now has a good job.

Binkley said she thought she had turned her life around after her father was shot and killed in South Haven in 2021 but had fallen back into her old ways after coming back to the area, getting a good job and working a lot of hours.

Judge Herman pointed out that this was Binkley's 10th felony conviction and fourth conviction for drugs. "Nobody's life gets better with drugs," he said. "You have to look at why you reach for drugs when something bad happens instead of reaching for help."

"You're really at the point where you have a good job and the potential for a good life ahead of you," he added. "If you end up in prison, that's gone."

Ronald Dirk Adams, 43, of Claremont Street in Buchanan, pleaded guilty to possession of methamphetamine and was sentenced to 18 months probation, credit for three days served and $2,148 in fines and costs. The charge will be reduced to use of meth if he is successful on probation.

The incident occurred Aug. 16, 2025 In Calvin Township near Cassopolis. He was found to be in possession of both meth and drugs during a traffic stop for speeding.

ADAMS

JENSEN

Judge Herman noted that Adams is a veteran and only has one previous misdemeanor conviction. "With your age and background, it's so frustrating to this court to see people turn to self-medication, alcohol and drugs. It only destroys their lives. Nothing gets better with meth, you only end up here or dead."

"You said you use meth because helps you at work," he added. "Hopefully you don't believe that, that's ludicrous to believe … Here's a little history lesson: Hitler had the troops use meth to be more productive, but they lost the war."

Carrie Lee Jensen, 47, of Union, pleaded guilty to possession of methamphetamine and was sentenced to two years probation, credit for 35 days served and $2,268 in fines and costs. The charge will be reduced to use of meth if she is successful on probation.

The incident occurred May 30, 2025 at a residence in Vandalia where Jensen was serving as a woman's caregiver. The judge noted that Jensen was providing drugs more than care to the woman and that there was evidence of meth use, scales and other items throughout the house.

Judge Herman said that Jensen has been to prison before for dealing drugs and having a meth lab and has been using meth since she was 13. "Look at what meth is doing to you," he said. "It's not a matter of if but when you will get caught. You need to look seriously at why you use drugs, you're only going to return to jail or prison if you continue."

In other last sentencing, a Vandalia man received probation for two counts of resisting police.

Nathan James English, 27, of Vandalia, pleaded guilty to two counts of resisting and obstructing police and was sentenced to two years probation, credit for six days served and $2,486 in fines and costs.

The incident occurred Sept. 19, 2025 at a residence in Vandalia. Police were called to a domestic disturbance and arrested English at the scene. He resisted police and threatened to kill himself.

"When I deal with resisting police cases, I always say cooperate with police," the judge said. "Two things invariably happen, they always catch you and resisting only make things worse. Even if you think police are doing something wrong, cooperate, and tell your attorney. That's what attorneys are for, to bring the issue to court."

Berrien County admin leaving for new role

Dissette heads to Ottawa County as deputy administrator

By JULIE SWIDWA
HP Correspondent

ST. JOSEPH — Brian Dissette is leaving his job as Berrien County administrator by the end of the month.

DISSETTE

Dissette said Thursday he has accepted an offer to become Ottawa County's next deputy administrator. He will serve under Administrator Patrick Waterman, who formerly served as deputy administrator.

According to a news release issued Wednesday by Ottawa County, Dissette was chosen from a pool of 54 applicants for the position.

"Throughout his career, Brian has led and supported a range of regional collaboration efforts, including the creation of a regional recreation authority, refinements to a regional water and sewer authority, regional police services agreements, and multiple initiatives focused on economic development," Ottawa County's news release stated.

Waterman, expressed high praise for Dissette, saying, "We are thrilled to have Brian join the Ottawa County team. He brings nearly 24 years of local government experience that will serve the residents well."

Dissette has been Berrien County's administrator since 2020. Prior to that, he was the South Haven city manager for nearly 12 years after serving two years as assistant city manager. Before that, he spent four years as Watervliet's city manager.

Dissette announced his departure publicly Thursday at a Berrien County Board Committee of the Whole meeting.

In a phone interview Thursday, Dissette said he had spoken with Board Chairman Mac Elliott and met one-on-one with all elected officials over the past week.

He holds a master's degree in public administration and a bachelor's degree in public relations, both from Western Michigan University.

"I've been interested in local government since I was a teenager," Dissette said.

Since early in his career, Dissette said he has admired Ottawa County's commitment to quality governance, innovative service delivery and organizational integrity.

"I look forward to bringing my experience in county leadership, communication, cross-departmental management and strategic planning to Ottawa," he said.

Ottawa County has a population about double that of Berrien County. Estimates in 2024 listed Ottawa's population at 306,235 and Berrien County's population at 152,703.

"This is an opportunity for me to grow in a larger organization," Dissette said. "I've always seen Ottawa County as very distinct in programming and service delivery, and it was always on my radar as an organization I was interested in joining."

He said he values good service more than any job title. He is expected to start in his new role Feb. 2, after his contract is finalized.

He told the county board Thursday that he has very much appreciated the opportunity to serve the county.

"The staff here is phenomenal," he told The Herald-Palladium. "It's a wonderful team, and I'm so impressed with all of them."

He said his wife, Kelly, and their three children have been supportive of his career path.

Contact: jswidwa@thehp.com, Twitter: @HPSwidwa

Area residents sentenced at Niles courthouse

By DEBRA HAIGHT
For Leader Publications

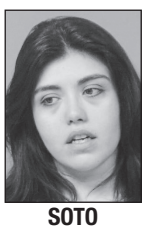
NILES — Three area residents were sentenced Monday in Berrien County Trial Court at the Niles courthouse. One of the sentencings was the culmination of a case that had gone twice to the Michigan Court of Appeals on marijuana related issues.

Julia Kathleen Soto, 35, formerly of Niles and now of Kalamazoo, pleaded guilty to possession with intent to deliver marijuana and was sentenced to credit for two days served, 100 hours of community service and $278 in fines and costs.

The incident occurred Oct. 26, 2022, in Niles. Soto was arrested after Michigan State Police learned of a marijuana shipment coming from Illinois to southwest Michigan.

Defense attorney Daniel Grow noted Monday that the case had been appealed to the Michigan Court of Appeals twice, one time to question the validity of the search warrant conducted on Soto's home and another time to ask whether the crime should be classified as a felony, misdemeanor or civil infraction in light of Michigan marijuana laws.

"This has been a wildly eye-opening experience for the defendant," Grow said. "The case has also been of interest to people associated with the marijuana industry in Michigan."


SOTO

LAYLIN

COLLETT

Grow reported that Soto's life has been changed by the experience and that she now is employed with two jobs. He asked for no additional jail as Soto has never had any violation in over two years of supervised release.

"My life has changed dramatically," Soto said. "I'm ready for my life to move forward."

Berrien County Trial Court Judge Gordon Hosbein noted both the age of the case which dates back to 2022 and the fact that this was Soto's first felony conviction.

Judge Hosbein said that while the probation agent had recommended a short jail sentence, he didn't find it necessary. "I will note that there has been no bond violations over the last three years and no problems," he said. "At this point, two weeks in jail will just set you back so I will order community service in lieu of jail."

Amber Star Laylin, 40, of Niles, pleaded guilty to larceny in a building and was sentenced to 150 days in jail. She has credit for 66 days served and must pay $198 in fines and costs and $68.99 in restitution.

The incident occurred June 2 at an apartment building in Niles where she stole a package out of a mail room.

Defense attorney Carrie Briseno acknowledged that Laylin had violated the trust of the apartment building's residents. "She understands that and wants the opportunity to give back," she said.

Laylin said she was sorry for her actions and acknowledged that what she did was wrong. "This situation taught me a powerful lesson," she said. "I'm committed to be better. I have learned from this experience and want to restore people's trust in me."

Judge Hosbein noted that Laylin's past record including other felony convictions have stemmed from her drug addiction. "I hope you get help for your drug addiction," he said. "If you don't, you will end up back here. I hope you use your time in custody positively and come out realizing you can't do this in the future."

A Benton Harbor man was given credit for time served for a firearm charge.

Dakota Mukwa Collett, 23, formerly of Edwardsburg and now of Benton Harbor, pleaded guilty to possession of a firearm in a motor vehicle and was sentenced to credit for one day in jail and $198 in fines and costs. He must forfeit the weapon.

The incident occurred Oct. 10 in Berrien Springs.

Defense attorney Shayne Williams said Collett is currently seeking mental health services and counseling through the Pokagon Band of the Potawatomi. For his part, Collett apologized and said he hopes to do better in the future.

Assistant Prosecutor Myrene Koch noted that Collett had failed previously on probation. Collett previously was sentenced to probation in Cass County Circuit Court in 2021 for conspiracy to commit second-degree home invasion.

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OPINION

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How little books, millions of them, helped in Word War II

By RICK KOGAN
Chicago Tribune (TNS)

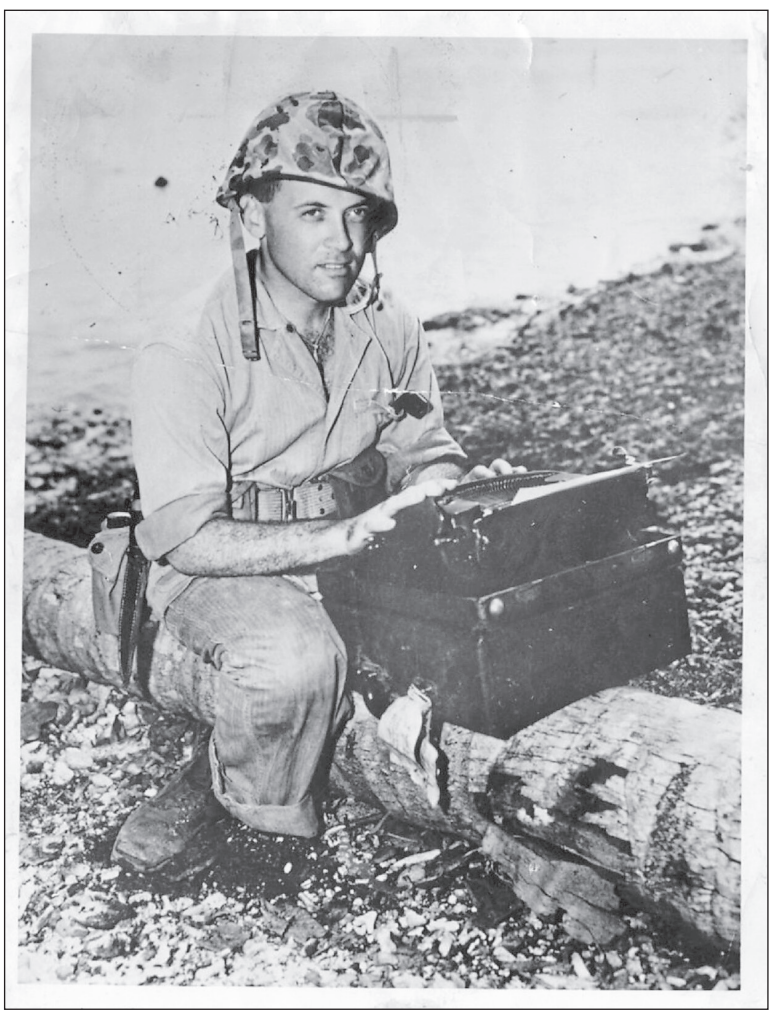
CHICAGO — I have a photo of my father, sitting on a log on a beach somewhere in the South Pacific during World War II. Herman Kogan was a U.S. Marine Corps sergeant, a combat correspondent who fought in and reported from battles at Guadalcanal, Okinawa and elsewhere and, of course, made it home safely to Chicago.

He wrote stories for the Chicago Tribune during the war, and he read books too. I look at this photo and imagine one of those books tucked in a pocket of his fatigues, and I know that he was not alone, because more than 120 million books found their way to soldiers fighting in WWII.

He did not talk much about the war as I was growing up, but he did tell me about some of the books he read when the guns were silent. It is one of the most remarkable if relatively forgotten stories of that war, but this books-in-battle tale came rushing back with the release of the latest limited edition from the ever-imaginative company called Field Notes.

Four times a year or so since its founding in 2007, this local outfit has come forth with these limited editions. The previous 68 of them have featured such topics as baseball, dime novels, space flights, national parks, the Great Lakes, and on and creatively on.

This new one is called "1943" and was inspired by Armed Services Editions, a series of fiction and nonfiction books published and distributed to the U.S. military from 1943-47. More than 120 million copies of 1,200 titles went to troops in a small paperback format designed for a soldier's pocket.



Kogan family photo / TNS

U.S. Marine Corp. sergeant and foreign correspondent Herman Kogan during a pause in the fighting in the South Pacific in 1943.

The story came to the attention of Field Notes recently when one of the company's recently hired young designers, Casey Rheault, found some images of the ASE books online. He showed them to Field Notes boss Jim Coudal, asking him, "Have you ever seen these?" Coudal had not, and later that day, he bought some historic examples on eBay.

Coudal explains the Field Notes philosophy to me: "We like digging deep on subjects. We like selling notebooks, and we like telling stories. This edition ticked all those boxes. We don't worry about things, we just take it on faith that if we are curious about something and excited about the process, people like us will dig it too."

The "1943" edition "mimics the ASE's horizontal orientation. While they're our usual 5.5-by-3.5-inch memo book size, they're the first with two staples on the short side instead of three on the long side." They come in bright red, yellow and blue.

Coudal had made a call to his friend, novelist and frequent collaborator Kevin Guilfoile, to share his excitement about this project. And they have come with something extra, inspired by the "gold mine" found in their digging and reading "When Books Went to War," a 2014 book by Molly Guptill Manning.

The book has inspired a rare Field Notes podcast featuring Guilfoile in conversation for an hour with the lively and smart author.

But wait, there's more, and it comes in the form of Samuel Dashiell Hammett's "The Maltese Falcon." Though Guilfoile writes it "was never published as an Armed Services Edition, it is the type of sexy, gritty, realist novel that undoubtedly would have been a favorite among the troops."

It is published now as a Field Note Brand Books release, available as part of a "1943" package or as an individual title. It's the second such book, following Guilfoile's "A Drive into the Gap," about baseball and fathers and sons and which Pulitzer Prize-winning Chicago author Jonathan Eig called "extraordinary, (a) beautifully written story about baseball and memory. Simply amazing."

Guilfoile also tells of the happy fate of what many consider the great American novel, "The Great Gatsby." Most forget that it attracted only modest attention and sad sales when first published in 1925. But after it was reprinted as an ASE, it was, Guilfoile writes, "a huge hit. … (It) almost certainly would never have made it to your 21st century high school reading list if not for the ASE program." (Poor F. Scott Fitzgerald would never know; he died in 1940.)

Guilfoile also gives us the censorship-shadowed publishing history of "The Maltese Falcon," which was first published as a serial across five issues of Black Mask Magazine and he solves one of the mysteries of the 1941 film version of the book, which starred Humphrey Bogart as private detective Sam Spade. Guilfoile writes of a seminal line in the film, when Bogart refers to the falcon as "the stuff that dreams are made of."

As Guilfoile explains, "This, the most famous line from the film, does not appear in the novel or the screenplay. It's adapted from Shakespeare's "The Tempest," and legend has it that Bogart suggested it to (director John) Huston on set, while shooting the film's final scene."

That's good to know. As for the entire ASE saga, Guilfoile says that it "transformed many soldiers into passionate readers, … comforted millions of people in battle zones, and fostered a culture of reading. … The program turned forgotten works into beloved classics, expanded the market for affordable books, and promoted literature for both entertainment and the public good."

There exists only one complete set of the books, and it resides at the Library of Congress. Individual books for sale pepper the internet. Many libraries hold some. I am holding one of them, "You Know Me Al" by Ring Lardner, once a writer at this paper. It's worn, its pages a bit darkened and a few torn and tattered and all that tells me is that once a soldier had it in his pocket, somewhere, long ago.

Homeless youth say they need more from schools, social services

By ROBBIE SEQUEIRA
Stateline.org (TNS)

Twenty-year-old Mikayla Foreman knows her experience is meaningful. Dealing with homelessness since 18 and currently living in a shelter, Foreman has managed to continue her academic journey, studying for exams last month in hopes of attaining a nursing degree.

But Foreman believes there were intervention points that could've prevented her from experiencing homelessness in the first place.

"If someone in school had understood what I was going through, things could've been very different," she said in an interview with Stateline.

As more cities impose bans, fines or jail time for adults living on the streets, young people who have been homeless say they face unique problems that could have been addressed earlier. Through more than 400 interviews and survey responses, young people across the country recently told researchers how earlier guidance and intervention might have made a difference for them. The research suggests the country is missing its biggest opportunity to prevent youth homelessness – by intervening well before a young person reaches a shelter and years before they are chronically homeless.

The report, from Covenant House and the University of California, Berkeley, finds that the pathways into youth homelessness are different from those of adults experiencing temporary or chronic homelessness. A young person coming out to their family, or becoming pregnant, or experiencing untreated trauma can create conflicts that push them into homelessness. A lot of that doesn't show up in current data.

The survey responses offer the nation's schools and social services agencies the chance to get ahead of youth homelessness, researchers say, not only by intervening earlier, but also by pinpointing and responding to the diversity of needs among teenagers and young adults who might be close to losing their housing.

Advocates say there are multiple intervention points – in school, in child welfare organizations and inside family dynamics – where the worst outcomes can be avoided. States such as California, Florida, Hawaii, Oregon and Washington have explored some of those intervention points in policies that range from guaranteed income pilot programs to youth-specific rental assistance and campus housing protections. Hawaii has made its youth drop-in and crisis-diversion program permanent, and Oregon and Washington have expanded rental assistance and education-centered supports for vulnerable youth. Florida now requires colleges to prioritize housing for homeless and foster students.

"With young people, we have opportunities to intervene much further upstream – in schools, in families, in child welfare – before anyone has to spend a single night on the streets. That's simply not the case with older adults," said David Howard, former senior vice president for Covenant House and a co-author of the new research, in an interview with Stateline.

"Even at 18, 20 or 24 [years old], young people are still developing," Howard said. "Their vulnerabilities look very different from middle-aged adults, and the support systems they need are different too."

One of the key points of intervention for potentially homeless youth is school. Public schools across the country have increasingly reported more homeless students since the COVID-19 pandemic.

And homelessness has many various regional factors outside of individual circumstances, such as climate-driven homelessness. More than 5,100 students in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina became homeless as a result of hurricanes Helene and Milton in 2024.

"Homelessness is multifaceted and lots of us slip through the cracks because the system isn't designed for our reality," said Foreman, a former Covenant House resident who helped conduct the new research.

Foreman's insights and lived experience were included in the study, which showed that youth homelessness rarely begins with an eviction or job loss – frequent causes of homelessness among adults.

The top three reasons that young people experience homelessness for the first time, according to respondents, were being kicked out of their family homes, running away, and leaving an unsafe living situation such as one affected by domestic violence. Other instigators included being unable to afford housing, aging out of foster care, being kicked out of or running away from foster care, and moving away from gang violence.

However, respondents also had suggestions for ways government, schools and the community could help or prevent youth homelessness. They suggested youth-specific housing options, identifying and helping at-risk youth in health care settings, providing direct cash assistance and offering conflict resolution support within families.

Among the most common suggestions was to offer services that create long-lasting connections for young people.

"Strong relationships with non-parental adults, including mentors, teachers, service providers, and elders, were identified as especially important when family connections were strained or absent," the report said.

The surveys and interviews also demonstrated that young people want mental health care tailored to their personal experience, said Benjamin Parry, a lead researcher on the report, speaking during a September webinar hosted by Point Source Youth, a nonprofit that works to end youth homelessness.

The research breaks out responses from a few specific groups – Indigenous, Latino, immigrant, LGBTQ+ people of color and pregnant or parenting youth – to understand their distinct needs, said Parry, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of California, Berkeley's School of Public Health. "There's so much nuance and specificity within these different groups."

Indigenous youth, for example, often are dealing with the effects of intergenerational trauma and alcoholism that have been projected onto them, Parry said. Those young people have far different needs than pregnant or parenting youth, he noted.

"They are like, 'I don't know where my next paycheck's going to come from, I don't know how to put food in my baby's stomach, I don't have a support network or someone to go to for this advice,'" he said. "That specificity is exactly why we need to understand this better and do better to tailor our approaches and responses."

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Local Playwright Festival returns to the Beckwith

SUBMITTED

DOWAGIAC — Beckwith Theatre Company kicks off its season with the return of the Local Playwright Festival, a dynamic showcase of original 10-minute plays written, directed, and performed entirely by regional artists. The festival runs Feb. 6-7 at 7:30 p.m. and Feb. 8 at 2 p.m.

Back by popular demand after a successful inaugural year, the festival highlights creativity and storytelling power of the southwest Michigan theatre community. Nine original works, ranging from thought-provoking drama to laugh-out-loud comedy, will be brought to life in a fast-paced evening of theatre that offers something for every audience member.

"This festival is a celebration of the incredible talent we have right here in our community," said Jennifer Shoemaker, President of the Beckwith Theatre Board of Directors. "From the playwrights who crafted these stories to the directors and actors who bring them to the stage, every element of this production is homegrown. It's a testament to the vitality of regional theatre" commented Larry Nielsen, Founder of the festival.

The 2026 lineup features works from local playwrights including Larry Nielsen, Linda LaRocque, Kristen Robinson, Dennis W. Feece, Michael E. Cafferky, and Thelma Phillips, with one playwright choosing to remain anonymous. The plays explore themes as diverse as wartime memories, lifelong friendship, love and choices, aging and memory, and the unexpected humor found in everyday moments.

Each 10-minute play uses minimal scenery to allow for quick transitions between pieces, creating an energetic theatrical experience that keeps audiences engaged from start to finish. Whether audiences are moved by the poignant farewell in "Til the Geese Fly North," laugh at the absurdity of "Under the Seats," or reflect on the touching encounters in "Seeking Shelter," the festival promises an evening of memorable storytelling.

Photo provided

Dowagiac resident Sheila Brown will appear on the popular gameshow Wheel of Fortune later this month.

Ready for action

Dowagiac resident set to appear on 'Wheel of Fortune'

SUBMITTED

DOWAGIAC — A longtime Cass County employee will fulfill a longtime dream later this month when she appears on popular gameshow Wheel of Fortune.

Sheila Brown, a civil clerk with Cass County District Court, will celebrate her 30th anniversary with the county in March.

"I have applied several times and finally got a call for an interview and made it," Brown said of her experience getting on the show.

The decades-old television program features contestants spinning a large wheel filled with prizes before guessing letters in a word puzzle similar to Hangman.

"It was so positive. I wasn't expecting everyone, including the fellow contestants, to be so fun and positive," Brown said.

Brown, a Cassopolis native currently living in Dowagiac, will appear in the episode airing at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 21 on CBS. Wheel of Fortune will also be available to stream on Hulu and Peacock the day after it airs on television.

PET OF THE WEEK

Skye is an almost-1-year-old pibble who loves naps, car rides and playtime. She's great with other dogs and enjoys toys cuddles and picking the perfect nap spot in every room. Skye is spayed and current on shots. For more information, contact Animal Aid at infoanimalaidswmi@gmail.com.

Southwestern Michigan College's president selection process draws praise

SUBMITTED

PLEASANT

DOWAGIAC — Southwestern Michigan College's appointment of its new president has drawn praise from a group of community members.

The Cass County Concerned Stakeholders group has spoken out in support of the process that has led to the appointment of Dr. Klint Pleasant as the college's next president. Concerned Stakeholders was formed when Dr. Joe Odenwald resigned in February 2025, and SMC's Board of Trustees appointed Brent Brewer as interim president. At this same time, the Board decided to defer the decision to begin a search for a new president until a later date.

"With the appointment of Dr. Pleasant, Concerned Stakeholders thanked the voices who have spoken out in support of establishing a national search for a candidate with a doctorate and a broad administrative and academic background who could bring new ideas and strong leadership to the college," stated the group in a news release. "Concerned Stakeholders organized to protest the appointment of Brent Brewer as interim president as well as to call on the Board of Trustees to establish a formal presidential search process."

"The power of people's voices – those who signed the petition for change, and those who attended board meetings and other public meetings – has made a difference," added Julie Dye, a spokesperson for the group.

"By establishing a search process, holding open meetings and interviews, the Board of Trustees has conducted a transparent process that addressed the points raised in the Concerned Stakeholders Change.org petition," the statement continued. "Also, of note is that during this process, SMC's Board of Trustees changed its public comment policy to allow people to address the board on any subject, not just those on the agenda. Previous policy required people to submit their comments on non-agenda items in writing the day before the meeting.

"Going forward, Concerned Stakeholders will remain active, as it welcomes Dr. Pleasant and encourages members of the community to remain civically involved by attending board meetings as well as student events."

Debra Haight / For Leader Publications

ALR Founder Dr. Ayanna Redding was joined at the ribbon cutting and open house by Buchanan Mayor Mark Weedon.

ALR

From page A1

we're glad it will again be open and teaching students."

"We're watching growth in the city and more opportunities for education," he added. "This is an unbelievable opportunity for the city and for the future of the nursing world. Nurses are needed desperately right now."

"ALR is spearheading something that we will see continue in Buchanan," Weedon said. "The future of Buchanan is bright. In the next three to five years, the city is going to be on the rebound and we're starting to see expansion on this side of the city … Buchanan is here to stay and we're doing great things."

"I feel lucky to be here," Redding said. "This is a great city and Buchanan has been really welcoming. It feels great to see people here to support us including our lenders and contractors. We've been looking at this site for about a year and it took four months to fix up the building."

"I want to thank everyone who has come out to support us," she said. "I'm really honored to be here today. If it wasn't for everyone believing in me, I wouldn't be here today and Buchanan wouldn't now be a college town."

Redding told those attending the open house that classes were scheduled to start Monday of this week. Classes will be offered day and evening in a variety of subjects including ones for IV certification, medical terminology, clinical medical assistant, pharmacy technician, phlebotomy, practical nursing and nursing assistant.

ALR also has a Niles campus which will continue to offer classes in the subjects mentioned above. The Niles facility is located in a former dentist's office on East Main Street in downtown Niles. ALR has existing partnerships with Corewell Health and Beacon Health for clinical rotations.

People can register for classes at both locations by calling 269-635-5088. They can also learn more about ALR at the www.alrehs.com website.

Redding is an Elkhart native who started ALR in Florida in 2013 before moving back to the Michiana area. She began her career as a nurse before going into teaching which she has described as her true passion.

While the current ALR programs have state accreditation and licensing, they fill a different niche than traditional nursing and health care programs at area community colleges. The ALR courses are clock hour based in terms of what students have to complete rather than credit hour based.

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Sports

Buchanan girls take down Michigan Lutheran
Page B2

Got results?
max.harden@leaderpub.com

Late surge powers Cassopolis past Bangor

By SCOTT HASSINGER
For Leader Publications

CASSOPOLIS — Following the loss of junior floor leader Lucas Williams to an injury just before the Christmas break, the Cassopolis boys' basketball team now relies on several different players to remain consistent at both ends of the court.

Williams broke his ankle against Centreville just before the holiday break and the long-term status on the Rangers' junior guard will be known sometime later this week.

In the meantime, Cassopolis needed someone else to take charge in Tuesday's 49-36 Southwest 10 Conference win at home over Bangor. Providing the lift for the Rangers, now 6-0 in the Southwest 10 Conference and overall, were senior guard Trevon Peterson-Evans and sophomore center Tyson West.

Peterson-Evans poured in a game-high 19 points and collected six steals on the defensive end while also handing out one assist and collecting three rebounds. West contributed 11 points, seven rebounds, one assist, a pair of steals and one block. Carti'Yae Warren added seven points for the Rangers.

Cassopolis made 19 total field-goal attempts, including six three pointers and finished 8-of-12 at the foul stripe. In comparison, Bangor netted 14 field goals and went 3-of-5 at the charity stripe.

Jaylen Pratt and Jamier Pratt both hauled down five rebounds apiece and added two assists each for Cassopolis.

Cassopolis outrebounded Bangor 27-20.

The Rangers took a 39-32 advantage into the fourth quarter. Bangor (6-3) quickly sliced that deficit to four, 39-35 with a three pointer from junior guard Jonah Luter.

West, however, scored six of his 11 points during the final period, including converting a steal at midcourt into a slam dunk that ignited a 9-0 Rangers' run and extended the hosts' lead to double digits and sealed the win. The visiting Vikings didn't get their next points until only 26.5 seconds remained off a pair of Jared McCoy free-throw attempts.

"Tyson was great for us in the second half tonight. We played so tight in the first half after having not played for 14 or 15 days. His dunk there really got us going and gave us the energy we needed. He's such a charasmatic kid. I wished I had 20 more kids like him. He's one of the strongest kids in our school and can do good things when he gets the basketball," said Cassopolis head coach Charles Superczynski II. "Trevon has always been a natural scorer for us. It's hard to replace a guy like Lucas because he's such a key part of our team. The guys love him and miss him, but we're hoping we can get him back at some point."

Luter finished with 19 points for Bangor and McCoy added 14 for Ken Dietz's Vikings.

Peterson-Evans poured in eight points and was a defensive sparkplug early for his ballclub as the Rangerws jumped out to a quick 10-4 advantage. After Carson Pullins drained a short jumper for Bangor, Jaylen Pratt knocked down a shot to put the hosts in front 12-6 after the opening period.

A bucket inside and ensuing free throw from West put Cassopolis up 15-9 with 6:23 left in the half. However, Bangor would pull back within one point, 15-14 on a close-range bucket by junior Lukas Remington. West answered with a bucket in the post and Warren drained a triple to put the Rangers back up by six, 20-14. Bangor then scored back-to-back buckets to close the half and trail by just one field goal, 20-18 entering halftime.

Cassopolis enjoyed a pair of five-point leads during the third quarter before a Luter triple brought the Vikings back within just three points, 33-30 late in the period. But the hosts outscored their guests 6-2 to finish off the stanza and hike its lead to seven, 39-32, entering the fourth quarter.

"I really felt like we moved the ball very well tonight. We want to utilize our post game and see what we have down low. I thought Bangor did a nice job collapsing in on our big guys and finally late in the game we start breaking loose a bit building on our lead. When we work the ball around and have all five guys touch it, I think we are scoring 85 percent of the time when we are patient like that," Superczynski II said.

Dietz felt the Rangers' athleticism posed a big challenge for his rapidly improving Bangor squad.

"I thought we rebounded well all night long but turnovers eventually caught up to us. Cassopolis is a much more athletic team than we are, but when we move the ball around and look for a good shot we're as good as anyone," Dietz said. "We are trying to get pride back into this program and these kids are showing up and putting in the work. We need to develop more depth though. But I'm happy with these kids because they play their tails off. I'm pleased with the community and support of the school for our program."

Scott Hassinger / Leader Publications

Cassopolis' Trevon Peterson-Evans (22) tries to score against Bangor defender Jonah Luter (2).

A LEGEND RECOGNIZED

Don Bender inducted into Hall of Fame

Late Niles coach honored by MITCA

By MAXWELL HARDEN
max.harden@leaderpub.com

Photo provided

Don Bender speaks to his players during a basketball game against Grand Haven.

NILES — Steve Bender received a Christmas present he will not soon forget.

Last month, the Hall of Fame Buchanan coach learned that his father, Hall of Fame Niles coach Don Bender, was posthumously inducted into the Michigan Interscholastic Track Coaches Association Hall of Fame.

"It was a 15-year process. Jonathan Rodriguez, the Berrien Springs track coach, told me to give it one more try because they needed to honor somebody in southwestern Michigan," Steve said. "I decided to start a huge campaign, contacting several of my dad's former athletes, even back into the 1940s, to write letters of recommendation. When the packet was received, the organizers were impressed. When I got the email, I bawled like a baby."

A Grand Rapids native, Bender played tight end for the University of Michigan football team before transferring to Western Michigan University to play basketball. After graduating, Bender was hired in 1947 by Niles High School, where he served in multiple capacities, acting as a varsity assistant track and field coach specialized in hurdles and field events, the JV boys basketball coach and the varsity football line coach.

During his tenure as an assistant track coach from 1947 to 1965, the program earned 14 conference championships, six regional titles and the Class A state championship in 1950. As a high school basketball coach, he finished his career with a 180-74 record.

Following the construction of Ballard and Ring Lardner in 1965, Bender transitioned to Ring Lardner Junior High to coach 9th grade football and 7th-9th grade track and field aiming to establish strong foundational programs to feed the high school. Between 1965 and 1988, he achieved a record of 439-57 in track and 112-24 in football. His 9th grade football teams were undefeated from 1967 to 1973 and his track teams remained unbeaten in dual meets from 1971 to 1977.

Bender – who died in 2010 at the age of 86 – was known for his passion and enthusiasm, with Steve stating that he routinely recruited 100 to 130 boys for his track teams each season. His exploits earned him inductions into both the Michigan Football Coaches Hall of Fame and the Michigan Coaches Hall of Fame, where he and Steve are one of only two father-son duos ever inducted.

While those inductees meant a lot to Bender, Steve said that being inducted into the MITCA Hall of Fame would have meant more to Bender than the other two combined.

"My dad had been inducted into two other Hall of Fames, but track was his passion for 42 years and it seemed like he never got the credit," Steve said. "Everyone in the area already assumed he was in that Hall of Fame and would ask why he wasn't. I think it was partially because he spent half his career at the junior high and high school coaches were traditionally recognized more. He unselfishly started a new program at Ring Lardner that just ballooned."

Bender's influence extended to Steve, who he encouraged to enter coaching by helping him secure a position at Buchanan.

"He knew the AD at Buchanan and they had a varsity boys track opening, and said I needed to get my foot in the door to potentially get a teaching job," Steve said. "I interviewed at 2 p.m. and was their track coach at 3 p.m. My dad told me he would teach me all I needed to know the first year."

Don's initial push led to a distinguished 44-year coaching career for Steve, including five Hall of Fame inductions of his own.

"He was a great influence on me," Steve said. "I wasn't planning on going into coaching until he called and said, 'You need to do this.' Lo and behold, I coached for 44 years and he did 42. That's a lot of years for the Bender family."

For Steve, his father's induction to the Hall of Fame was a promise delivered.

"I told him 15 years ago that I was someday going to add this to his headstone," Steve said. "I went to the monument place and it's in the works. So many people in Niles knew him, and the entire community in southwest Michigan is likely thinking this is very well-deserving."

Duane Davis steps down as Dowagiac head football coach

By MAXWELL HARDEN
max.harden@leaderpub.com

File photo

Duane Davis announced this week that he has resigned after five seasons leading the Chieftains.

DOWAGIAC — The Dowagiac football program will have a new head coach in 2026.

Dowagiac athletic officials have begun the search for a new varsity football coach after Duane Davis announced this week that he has resigned after five seasons leading the Chieftains.

"I want to say thank to my wife and my kids for giving up time with dad so he can be at football," Davis said in a statement to Leader Publications. "I want to thank the staff that put in so much time to get the program going in the right direction, I want to thank [Athletic Director] Brent Nate for taking a chance on an alumni with zero head coaching experience, I want to thank the community and the parents for support, administration and school board for the support and coach Mike Stanger and coach Benard Thomas for their support.

"Most of all, I want to thank the players – from flag football all the way to high school – for fighting to be better and coming to work everyday for the Orange and black. On Dowagiac!"

Davis, a 2004 Dowagiac graduate, was able to rebuild and stabilize the program after overcoming 0-9 and 2-7 seasons in 2021 and 2022. After his 2-16 start, he led the Chieftains to a 17-12 record over the past three seasons, including two consecutive playoff appearances and a share of the 2025 Lakeland Conference Championship.

"When he took over, there were less than 35 guys total within the program," said Dowagiac Athletic Director Brent Nate. "We are now back up to the mid-60s, reaching almost 70 players last year. He and his staff put the work in to provide stability and establish trust between coaches and players. They changed the culture and restored a standard within the program regarding what is acceptable, the style we play, the physicality, and the commitment to it. It is special to play for Dowagiac football and he re-established pride in the program."

As for the coaching search, Nate said the job is open to anyone ready to take the program to the next level.

"We are looking to take the next step as a program," Nate said. "Coach Davis re-established the foundation and now we are looking for a leader to take us to the next level. That foundation includes our high school kids, the middle school, the youth program and a strong presence in the community.

Since 1950, Dowagiac is second among lower southwest Michigan teams in wins (436) and first in win percentage (.630). In 1990, the Chieftains became the first program in Cass County to win a football state championship, earning the Class B title.

"We believe it is a special place to coach football," Nate said. "Friday nights here mean something to the kids, the school, and the community. It takes the right person to do it, and that is who we are looking for. We appreciate the commitment Duane put into the community during his time as a head coach."

Niles' Thornton signs with SMC basketball

By MAXWELL HARDEN
max.harden@leaderpub.com

DOWAGIAC — A Niles Vikings hoops standout is now a Roadrunner.

Niles senior Jessica Thornton signed her NJCAA Letter of Intent Wednesday to play women's basketball in 1st Source Bank Fieldhouse for Head Coach Ariana Dampier and the Roadrunners starting in Fall 2026.

"Jess will be a great addition to the team," Dampier said. "She is a hard worker who is constantly in the gym perfecting her craft. She can shoot from the outside, attack the paint, and defend at a high level. She brings a winning mentality and competes on every possession. I'm looking forward to coaching her and watching her continue to grow within our program."

Thornton is the first member of the 2026 SMC Women's Basketball recruiting class.

SMC brings a 6-7 record into conference play, which begins Saturday, January 10, against the Marian Ancilla Chargers. In their last non-conference game, the team set a new single-game scoring record in a 114-61 victory over North Central Michigan. Four Roadrunners scored over 20 points each, led by sophomore guard Rayvan Rush with 30.

Photo provided

Niles senior Jessica Thornton (center) poses with teammates after signing her letter of intent to play for Southwestern Michigan College.

Buchanan girls beat Michigan Lutheran

By BEN SANDERS
For Leader Publications

ST. JOSEPH — Buchanan's girls basketball team got right back to its winning Tuesday night, defeating Michigan Lutheran 64-31 on Tuesday in a Berrien-Cass-St. Joseph Conference matchup.

The girls game was the second game in as many nights for Buchanan (2-4). The Bucks lost a 50-48 thriller to St. Joseph on Monday. 6-foot-2 freshman center Gabby Carson had 22 points, 14 rebounds and six blocks in the win.

Justyce Cashier added 11 points for Buchanan, and Amelia Elder led Michigan Lutheran with 10. Evangeline Liss added seven and provided the highlight of the night for the Titans by converting a four-point play.

Contact: bsanders@TheHP.com, 429-1294, Twitter: @HPBenSanders

Buchanan's Harper Griffin and Justyce Cashier battle for control of the ball against Michigan Lutheran's Lucy Johnson during Tuesday night's game at Michigan Lutheran High School.

Photos by Don Campbell / HP staff

Michigan Lutheran's Isla Hendrickson and Aubrey Barnes pressure Buchanan's Harper Griffin during Tuesday night's game.

Michigan Lutheran's Allie Lesher shoots over Buchanan's Cora Weinberg during Tuesday night's game at Michigan Lutheran High School.

Buchanan's Gabby Carson shoots over Michigan Lutheran's Lucy Johnson and Amelia Elder during Tuesday night's game at Michigan Lutheran High School.

Buchanan's Harper Griffin pressures Michigan Lutheran's Mya Lemke during Tuesday night's game at Michigan Lutheran High School.

HIGH SCHOOL SCOREBOARD

PMG STAFF

BOYS BASKETBALL

Monday's results

BUCHANAN 47, MICHIGAN LUTHERAN 42

LUTHERAN (42)
Daniel Pearson 0 1-2 1, Samuel Edikabi 1 1-2 3, Ethan Eggert 0 1-2 1, Anthony Ealey 1 0-2 2, Jordan Duensing-Beck 4 0-0 11, Khannor Hamilton 1 0-0 3, Thorian Swisher 2 0-3 4, Connor Olson 6 3-8 17. Totals: 15 6-19 42.
BUCHANAN (47)
Payne 3 0-0 6, McBeth 2 6-6 11, Johnson 2 1-5 5, Seddon 1 0-0 3, Hinds 3 1-2 8, Thompson 2 0-2 4, Bosse 5 0-0 10. Totals: 18 8-15 47.

Lutheran	**8**	**13**	**10**	**11**	**—**	**42**
Buchanan	**14**	**9**	**15**	**9**	**—**	**47**

3-point goals – Lutheran 6 (Duensing-Beck 3, Olson 2, Hamilton), Buchanan 3 (McBeth, Seddon, Hinds). Total fouls – Lutheran 21, Buchanan 22. Fouled out – Ealey (ML). Technical foul – Buchanan bench. Lutheran stat leaders – Olson 4 rebounds; Ealey 3 rebounds, 2 steals, 2 assists.
Records – Michigan Lutheran 5-1, Buchanan 4-3.

NILES 65, ST. JOSEPH 61

ST. JOSEPH (61)
Evan Searles 1 0-0 2, Ben Varrie 2 0-0 4, Jaden Akinwale 0 1-2 1, Gordon Hosbein 3 0-0 8, Eli Caid 9 3-3 24, David DeVore 3 0-0 8, Donevin Ruchti 5 2-2 14. Totals: 23 6-7 61.
NILES (65)
Brayden Favors 8 7-10 24, Acie Kirtdoll 2 1-2 7, Derrick Hill 3 1-2 8, Ian Riggenbach 0 0-2 0, Bryce Zache 1 1-2 3, Ceon Kirtdoll 2 0-0 6, Donny Williams 3 0-0 7. Totals: 23 12-20 65.

St. Joseph	**16**	**14**	**18**	**13**	**—**	**61**
Niles	**19**	**20**	**20**	**6**	**—**	**65**

3-point goals – St. Joseph 9 (Caid 3, DeVore 2, Ruchti 2, Hosbein 2), Niles 7 (A. Kirtdoll 2, C. Kirtdoll 2, Favors, Hill, Williams). Total fouls – St. Joseph 16, Niles 10. Fouled out – none. Technical fouls – none.
Records – St. Joseph 3-4.

GIRLS BASKETBALL

Monday's results

BRANDYWINE 59, MICHIGAN LUTHERAN 16

LUTHERAN (16)
Aubrey Barnes 0 1-2 1, Amelia Elder 2 0-0 6, Allie Lesher 1 0-0 2, Evangeline Liss 0 0-2 0, Lucy Johnson 1 1-2 3, Isla Hendrickson 1 0-0 2. Totals: 5 2-6 14.
BRANDYWINE (59)
Hailey Smith 1 0-0 3, Macy Pellon 2 0-0 6, Karleigh Byrd 2 2-2 7, Sydney Olson 1 0-0 3, Zaya Price 5 3-3 13, Makenna Price 2 1-1 5, Lily Gill 6 1-1 15, Ailyanna Walker 0 1-2 1, Sydney Poedez 1 0-0 2, Makenzi Myer 2 0-0 4, Brook Brumitt 0 0-2 0. Totals: 22 8-11 59.

Lutheran	**3**	**3**	**0**	**10**	**—**	**16**
Brandywine	**32**	**17**	**4**	**6**	**—**	**59**

3-point goals – Lutheran 2 (Elder 2), Brandywine 7 (Pellon 2, Gill 2, Smith, Byrd, Olson). Total fouls – Lutheran 8, Brandywine 7. Fouled out – none. Technical fouls – none. Lutheran stat leaders – Johnson 4 rebounds, 6 steals; Hendrickson 4 rebounds, 1 assist; Lesher 4 rebounds; Liss 1 assist.
Records – Michigan Lutheran 3-3

ST. JOSEPH 50, BUCHANAN 48

Records — St. Joseph 4-0; Buchanan 1-4

Tuesday's results

ST. JOSEPH 60, NILES 50

St. Joseph top scorers — Lauer Wright 25, Lainie Dorow 19.
JV score – Niles 41, St. Joseph 27.
Records – St. Joseph 5-0; Niles 4-3

EDWARDSBURG 46, LAKESHORE 35

LAKESHORE (35)
Samantha Little 3 0-0 8, Sydney Thomas 8 0-0 21, Selena Gustafson 2 0-8 4, Avery Vroon 0 2-2 2. Totals: 13 2-10 35.
EDWARDSBURG (46)
Shelby Laubach 6 7-10 23, Shyann Thomas-Flannery 0 1-2 1, Liyah Worthington 1 0-0 2, Kya Shier 3 2-4 8, Mallory Schrock 4 1-1 10, Samantha O'Brien 1 0-0 2. Totals: 15 11-17 46.

Lakeshore	**8**	**7**	**12**	**8**	**—**	**35**
Edwardsburg	**9**	**11**	**13**	**13**	**—**	**46**

3-point goals – Lakeshore 7 (Thomas 5, Little 2), Edwardsburg 5 (Laubach 4, Schrock). Total fouls – Lakeshore 17, Edwardsburg 11. Fouled out – none. Technical fouls – none.

DOWAGIAC 57, WATERVLIET 27

Records — Dowagiac 2-5

Underwood returning to U-M for sophomore season

By ANGELIQUE S. CHENGELIS
The Detroit News (TNS)

TNS photo / David Guralnick, Detroit News

Michigan quarterback Bryce Underwood will return to Ann Arbor for his sophomore season under new head coach Kyle Whittingham.

Michigan quarterback Bryce Underwood signaled his return to the Wolverines for this upcoming season on social media late Monday, the first under new head coach Kyle Whittingham.

Whittingham, at his introductory news conference, made clear keeping Underwood was a top priority. Underwood started every game for Michigan in 2025 and went 9-4.

During his freshman season, Underwood, the No. 1 recruit in the nation in the 2025 class, completed 60 percent of his 335 passes for 2,428 yards and had 11 touchdowns and nine interceptions. Whittingham, at his introductory news conference on Dec. 28 in Orlando where he joined the team before the Citrus Bowl, said he met with Underwood for nearly an hour that morning.

"I did a lot of listening," Whittingham said at the news conference. "I wanted feedback from him. I wanted to get to know him. Everything from growing up, family, what's important to him – it was a great conversation.

"He's a special young man. Carries himself the right way. You got to have a quarterback that has that 'it' factor and Bryce definitely has that 'it' factor along with a ton of talent. Big, strong kid, 6-foot-4, 225-plus pounds. His ceiling is very high, and the offense that we are going to bring in here I think will suit him to a T. I think he's going to really, really excel and have a great experience here."

Bears preparing for intense atmosphere in playoff opener

By PHIL THOMPSON
Chicago Tribune (TNS)

CHICAGO — Chicago Bears coach Ben Johnson hasn't heard from a lot of old colleagues about making the playoffs as a first-year head coach, nor has he given himself a second to pat himself on the back for the achievement.

It's a short week before the Bears face the Green Bay Packers on Saturday for the third time in six weeks – and in a wild-card playoff game, no less.

"Just really focused at the task at hand," Johnson told reporters Tuesday at Halas Hall. "We'll worry about the reflection, we'll have plenty of time to do that when the season's over. We're not ready for that, you know?

"Just like I told those guys after the game (Sunday), we're mentally prepared to play for five more weeks. And so that's our intent."

The players were equally intense about getting ready for a playoff game.

"It's everything," said defensive end Montez Sweat, who has spent the last 2 1/2 seasons with the Bears. "You're usually packing the cars up, sending everything back home to home base and getting ready for the offseason. So it feels good preparing for the postseason right now."

Quarterback Caleb Williams, who will be playing in the NFL playoffs for the first time, harked back to his college and high school days.

"All the big games are the same to me," he said. "I think the mindset of it just changes a little bit because you know you don't have another game if you go out there and you don't accomplish the goal."

The Bears last made the postseason in 2020, led by coach Matt Nagy and quarterback Mitch Trubisky. They lost 21-9 to the Saints on Jan 10, 2021, in New Orleans.

They last hosted a playoff game on Jan. 6, 2019, a 16-15 loss to the Philadelphia Eagles – the infamous "Double Doink" game.

As much of a downer as that was for a stunned Soldier Field crowd, Bears players this season have noticed an uptick in the home crowd's intensity over the last month.

"It's awesome," safety Kevin Byard III said. "These past few games have been feeling like playoff atmospheres. … This city, it deserves a winner. It deserves a team that's going to be able to make this run."

Bears players witnessed raucous crowds as visitors to hostile Lambeau Field in Week 14, when they lost 28-21 to the Packers, and again on their home turf in Week 16, when Soldier Field erupted after Williams connected with DJ Moore on a 46-yard touchdown pass in overtime for a 22-16 victory.

So a third game against the hated Packers at Soldier Field?

Could it get any rowdier?

"I wouldn't expect nothing less," Byard said.

"But at the same time, we have to be smart enough, and that's when you talk about just the playoff experience, understanding that the personal foul penalties almost hurt us in the last game, so we can't have that this week."

In the rematch at Soldier Field, an amped-up Bears defense committed two roughing-the-passer and two unnecessary-roughness penalties, which nearly undermined their chance at victory.

"That's something that we're going to be talking about as a team," Byard said. "But the intensity level is going to be there. It's Green Bay at Soldier Field. The emotions are going to be high. It's going to be a super exciting atmosphere, but also understand it's playoffs. The refs are probably going to call it a little tighter.

"More eyes on the game. It's going to be a nationally televised game, so just understanding all those elements and make sure you're playing smart, taking it all the way up until that line. Don't cross the line, but take it all the way up there because that's the intensity that's going to be needed to win this game."

Lions part ways with OC Morton after missing playoffs

By NOLAN BIANCHI
The Detroit News (TNS)

DETROIT — The Detroit Lions have parted ways with offensive coordinator John Morton after one season, the team announced Tuesday evening.

Morton was hired last offseason to take over for the departing Ben Johnson, now the coach of the Chicago Bears, and failed to meet the standard set by his predecessor. After eight games, Lions coach Dan Campbell opted to relieve Morton of his play-calling duties and take over for the rest of the season.

Detroit's offense was by no means bad under Morton, and he did have the unfortunate circumstance of having to replace an All-Pro center in Frank Ragnow just before the season. Entering what would be his final game as play-caller, a 27-24 loss to the Minnesota Vikings on Nov. 2, the Lions were third in points per game and eighth in total offense.

But things didn't look right, at least not compared to the standard that had been set in previous seasons. The offense didn't play well situationally, and they were often the unit that didn't uphold its end of the complementary football bargain. As problems persisted, it didn't seem like anybody was on the same page as to why – starting with Morton.

"Overall, I think that it's just more effort for (Campbell), and it sucks that he kind of had to deal with that, but I feel like for what we had here, he was probably the best person for the job," Lions center Graham Glasgow said of the situation this past Monday.

After the first loss to Minnesota, Campbell said the primary issue with the team's struggles was communication. "Listen, we did not handle some of the communication well. Not well enough, where we all need to be on the same page," Campbell said right after the game.

A few days later, Morton was asked about the communication issues that were plaguing the offense.

"I think our communication has been really good," Morton said. "Ever since the Green Bay game, it's been really good. It's just a matter of some guys getting beat. That's all it is. I'm just telling you that's – when you look at it over and over and over, it's one or two guys that are just breaking down."

A few days after that, Morton was relieved of his play-calling role for good. In Campbell's first game in the role, Detroit's offense put up 546 yards and scored five touchdowns in a 44-22 win against the Washington Commanders. Morton publicly handled the demotion well, saying at the time, "I fully support it."

As for his future in Detroit, the writing has been on the wall for more than half the season, even though Campbell suggested that Morton could resume play-calling duties after the two spent more time together.

Campbell will now make one of the most important hires of his tenure in finding Morton's replacement. While he knocked it out of the park with Johnson, his other two coordinator hires – Morton and Anthony Lynn, who also lasted less than a year as Detroit's play-caller – have not worked out.

Still, the Lions tied for fourth in points per game (28.3) and were fifth in total offense (373.2 yards per game). The Lions are not looking to tear down the preexisting scheme envisioned by Campbell, but rather someone who can help enforce the details to make it function at a high level while adding their own flavor.

Campbell could even decide to continue calling plays himself, although he's previously said that he prefers to focus on other aspects of the game in his role as head coach. But he said this week he plans to consider that as a plan of action going forward.

"I don't know exactly where I'm at with that yet," Campbell said of his role as play-caller. "I mean, I guess one of the good things if I did do that, you don't have to worry about somebody else leaving. You don't have to worry about your play-caller leaving. So, that would be one of the perks of it."

The timeline for hiring Morton's replacement is unclear. The Bears hired Johnson on Jan. 20 last offseason; Morton was officially announced as the new offensive coordinator in Detroit on Jan. 30.

Michigan State WR Marsh picks Indiana in transfer portal

By CONNOR EAREGOOD
The Detroit News (TNS)

DETROIT — Nick Marsh won't be coming back to Michigan State after exploring his options in the transfer portal. Instead, he'll play for a budding Big Ten power in Indiana.

Marsh committed to the Hoosiers Sunday after a visit to Bloomington, Ind., on Saturday. The rising junior wideout led the Spartans in receiving each of his first two seasons with 100 career receptions for 1,311 yards and nine touchdowns. In 2025, he set career highs in receptions (59), yards (662) and touchdowns (six).

Marsh was one of the earliest Spartans to enter the portal after the firing of Jonathan Smith and hiring of Pat Fitzgerald within two days of the end of the season. He joins the Hoosiers as the Big Ten champions ready for a College Football Playoff semifinal bout with Oregon, who the Hoosiers beat 30-20 on the road Oct. 11.

TNS / The Detroit News, Katy Kildee

Nick Marsh led Michigan State in receiving each of his first two seasons.

BASEBALL

No agreement between Tigers and Skubal (yet) ahead of arbitration

By CHRIS McCOSKY
The Detroit News (TNS)

DETROIT — The Tigers reached contract settlements on Thursday with seven of the eight remaining arbitration-eligible players.

They did not, however, reach an agreement with two-time Cy Young winner Tarik Skubal.

That doesn't mean Skubal and the Tigers are definitely going to arbitration, though. The Tigers under president Scott Harris have been a file-and-trial team, meaning they typically don't negotiate leading up to the hearings.

They made an exception last year to clarify a $25,000 discrepancy with pitcher Casey Mize. And it is expected they will make another exception and continue negotiating with Skubal, though on a much higher scale.

Both sides posted their salary requests to the league Thursday night. The Tigers submitted $19 million. Skubal, through his agent Scott Boras, submitted $32 million. It is the biggest spread in the history of the arbitration process. The two sides can continue to negotiate up until the hearing.

TNS / Robin Buckson, The Detroit News

Tigers ace Tarik Skubal is the first pitcher to win the American League Cy Young Award in back-to-back seasons since the turn of the century, and won pitching's Triple Crown in 2024.

Skubal, going into his final year of team control, made $10 million last season. And after two straight Cy Young seasons, he was expected to at least double that this offseason. In fact, he was projected to earn the highest arbitration raise ever received by a pitcher.

As ESPN insider Jeff Passan pointed out, Skubal, if his case goes to arbitration, which is a comparison-based assessment by a three-person panel, would almost certainly top Jacob deGrom's $9.6 million raise in 2019 (to $17 million) and David Price's record high $19.75 million award in 2015.

The highest arbitration salary ever awarded was $31 million to Juan Soto in 2023.

So, clearly, there is some work to be done. The Tigers likely bid lower than they expect to pay and Boras bid higher than he might expect to get. For that reason, it's hard to imagine either side wants to leave this in the hands of an arbitration panel – which awards one side's bid or the other. It doesn't work out compromises.

Each side will have to convince the panel that Skubal's value is $1 higher or lower than the midpoint between the two bids ($25.5 million).

The Tigers did lock up the rest of their arbitration-eligible class, reaching one-year deals with:

- Starting pitcher Casey Mize ($6.15 million)
- Outfielder Riley Greene ($5 million)
- Utility player Zach McKinstry ($4.2 million)
- First baseman Spencer Torkelson ($4.075 million)
- Reliever Will Vest ($3.95 million)
- Outfielder Kerry Carpenter ($3.275 million)
- Reliever Tyler Holton ($1.575 million)

Last month, the Tigers avoided arbitration with outfielder Matt Vierling ($3.255 million), catcher Jake Rogers ($3.05 million) and reliever Beau Brieske ($1.157 million).

Writer sees Tigers as a good fit for Tucker

By THE DETROIT NEWS (TNS)

Kyle Tucker is The Detroit News' top MLB free agent on the market.

Which teams would provide the best fit for the 28-year-old outfielder?

MLB.com's Mike Petriello counts the Tigers among eight teams that fit the bill.

Petriello explains his logic in settling on eight teams: "There's a handful of situations that just don't seem right, simply because he's not likely to choose a team that's in the midst of rebuilding. ... For others, either in contention or close to it, the baseball fit would make a ton of sense – imagine what a Cleveland or Miami lineup would look like with this kind of bat – but there's little recent history of playing in the contract waters that Tucker is likely to achieve."

With that in mind, Petriello settled on, in order, the Phillies, Giants, Dodgers, Blue Jays, Tigers, Mets, Diamondbacks and Yankees.

Of the Tigers, he writes:

"Understandably, the biggest question of the Detroit winter has been the will-they-or-won't-they about trading Tarik Skubal, which presently has led to absolutely nothing at all. That makes the downside here obvious: No one thinks they'd sign a major contract right now and also extend Skubal, so to sign Tucker today would send a signal about their ace that might make things … let's say, 'tricky.'

"On the other hand, there's considerable pressure to make a push to win while Skubal is there, and a big part of that has to come via an improved lineup, since the second-half Tigers were a bottom-10 unit last season. While Riley Greene is entrenched in left, and they hope Parker Meadows can improve in center until top prospect Max Clark is ready, right field is projected to be a bottom-10 group in 2026."

In one season with the Cubs in 2025, Tucker had 22 homers, 73 RBIs and a 4.5 WAR, slashing .266/.377/.464.

After seven seasons in Houston the Astros traded him to the Cubs in December 2024 and he signed a one-year, $22 million qualifying offer with Chicago.

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0900 LEGALS

STATE OF MICHIGAN
PROBATE COURT
COUNTY OF Cass

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Decedent's Estate

FILE NO.
2025-337-DE

Estate of:
Kenneth L. Gleason
Date of birth: 06/05/1952

TO ALL CREDITORS: *

NOTICE TO CREDITORS:
The decedent, Kenneth L. Gleason, died 11/16/2025. Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the estate will be forever barred unless presented to June Oswalt, 55183 Buckhorn Road, Three Rivers, MI 49093, personal representative, or to both the probate court at 60296 M-62, Suite 10, Cassopolis, MI 49031 and the personal representative within 4 months after the date of publication of this notice.

Date 01/05/2026

Malcolm J. Tuesley P24791
Attorney name Bar no.
212 E. LaSalle Ave., Ste 100
Address
South Bend, IN 46617
City, state, zip
574-232-3538
Telephone

June Oswalt
Personal representative
55183 Buckhorn Road
Address
Three Rivers, MI 49093
City, state, zip
269-506-9621
Telephone

STATE OF MICHIGAN
PROBATE COURT
COUNTY OF CASS

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Decedent's Estate

CASE NO.
2025-341-DE
JUDGE
Hon. Carol M. Bealor

Court Address
60296 M-62, Ste 10,
Cassopolis, MI 49031
Telephone no.
269-445-4454

Estate of: Linda Gunther
Date of birth: 05/11/1952

TO ALL CREDITORS: *

NOTICE TO CREDITORS: The decedent, Linda Gunther, died October 15, 2025. Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the estate will be forever barred unless presented to, Todd Howard Clement, personal representative, or to both the probate court at Law & Courts building 60296 M-62, Ste 10, Cassopolis, MI 49031 and the personal representative within 4 months after the date of publication of this notice.

Date 01/06/2026

Thomas J. Walz, Esq. P79360
Attorney name Bar No.
509 W. Washington St.
Address
South Bend, IN 46601
City, State, Zip
574-232-5988
Telephone no.

Todd Howard Clement
Personal representative
1801 Connecticut Avenue
Address
Elkhart, IN 46514
City, state, zip
574-226-7462
Telephone

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0900 LEGALS

GROUNDSKEEPER/LAWN MOWING BIDS
Wayne Township is seeking two bids: one for the position of Groundskeeper of the four township cemeteries, and the Township Hall/Fire Station, and the second for lawn mowing services for the same five properties. Complete job descriptions are available on the township website at www.waynetwpMI.org. or at the township hall. Call the township at 269-782-7027 for personal liability insurance requirements
All sealed bids are to be received by 4 pm on February 2, 2026. They may be sent to Wayne Township; 53590 Glenwood Road; Dowagiac 49047 Wayne Township reserves the right to reject any or all bids received. Wayne Township is an Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer.

LAGRANGE TOWNSHIP
Zoning Board of Appeals
Notice of Public Hearing

TO THE RESIDENTS AND PROPERTY OWNERS OF LAGRANGE TOWNSHIP, CASS COUNTY, MICHIGAN AND ANY OTHER INTERESTED PERSONS

Please take notice that a Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) Public Hearing will be held Tuesday, February 3, 2026 at 6:00pm Michigan time at the LaGrange Township Hall, 58253 M-62, Cassopolis, Michigan.

The purpose of this hearing is to hear comments concerning an addition to a non-conforming structure located at 61963 Lake ST, Cassopolis MI 49031. Parcel # 14-040-220-004-01
LEGAL DESCRIPTION
422-1151 822 LOT 4. ALSO N 1.8 FT OF LOT 3.
SUPERVISOR'S PLAT OF DIAMOND COVE.
The ZBA reserves the right to alter the proposed request at or following the public hearing.

The request may be examined by the general public at the Township Hall by appointment with the Township Clerk. All interested persons are invited to submit their comments in person or in writing at or before the Public Hearing. Written comments should be submitted to the Township Clerk at the address set out below. To be considered, they must be received by the Clerk before the Public Hearing or by the ZBA during the Hearing.

LaGrange Township will provide necessary reasonable auxiliary aids and services, such as signers for the hearing impaired and audio tapes of printed material being considered at the hearing, to individuals with disabilities upon seven (7) days' notice to the Township Clerk. Individuals with disabilities requiring auxiliary aids or services should contact the Township Clerk at the address and/or telephone number listed below.

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Tasha E. McCoy, Township Clerk
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ONTWA TOWNSHIP CASS COUNTY, MICHIGAN
NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

Please take notice that the Ontwa Township Zoning Board of Appeals will hold a public hearing on January 27, 2026, at 6:00 pm., at the Ontwa Township Hall located at 26225 US 12, Edwardsburg, MI 49112, to receive public comments on a variance request.

Paul Hanson representing Caseys Retail Company has submitted two variance requests for the development of a gas station located at 71287 M-62, Edwardsburg, Michigan (PN 14-090-017-035-11). The requests are as follows:

- Construction of a 25-foot-tall pole sign, 19 feet taller than the 6-foot height limit for signs per Section 19.03.07 of the Zoning Ordinance.
- Installation of 132.16 square feet of signage on site, 32.16 square feet greater than the cumulative 100 square feet of signage permitted by Section 19.03.07 of the Zoning Ordinance.

Copies of the application materials and the Township's zoning ordinances are available for public viewing during regular business hours at the Township Hall, 26225 US 12, Edwardsburg, MI 49112, or on the Township website: www.ontwatwp.org.

Written comments will be received from any interested persons by the Ontwa Township Clerk at the Ontwa Township Hall during regular business hours and may be further received by the Zoning Board of Appeals during the public hearing. Oral comments will be taken during the hearing.

If you are planning to attend this hearing and are handicapped, requiring any special assistance, please notify the Township Clerk by calling (269) 663-2347 as soon as possible.

Tina VanBelle, Ontwa Township Clerk

NOTICE OF MORTGAGE FORECLOSURE SALE Notice of foreclosure by advertisement. Notice is given under section 3212 of the revised judicature act of 1961, 1961 PA 236, MCL 600.3212, that the following mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at a public auction sale to the highest bidder for cash or cashier's check at the place of holding the circuit court in Cass County, starting promptly at 10:00AM on Wednesday February 4, 2026. The amount due on the mortgage may be greater on the day of the sale. Placing the highest bid at the sale does not automatically entitle the purchaser to free and clear ownership of the property. A potential purchaser is encouraged to contact the county register of deeds office or a title insurance company, either of which may charge a fee for this information. MORTGAGE SALE –Jason Dooley and Jean Dooley, original mortgagors, granted a Mortgage to Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems, Inc. ("MERS") acting solely as nominee for Top Flite Financial, Inc., dated November 30, 2024, and recorded December 9, 2024 as Liber 1254, Page 219; and assigned to Data Mortgage Inc., DBA Essex Mortgage by document recorded November 25, 2025 in Liber 1269, Page 516, in official records of Cass County Register of Deeds, Michigan, which mortgage there is claimed to be due at the date hereof the sum of $152,673.58. The following described premises: Located in the Township of Pokagon, Cass County, Michigan: Lot(s) 18 and 19 of RIDENOUR PARK according to the plat thereof recorded in Liber LE of Plats, Page 248 of Cass County Records. Commonly known as: 33320 Ridenour Drive, Dowagiac, MI 49047 Tax Parcel ID: 14-110-200-018-00 The redemption period shall be 6 months from the date of such sale, unless determined abandoned in accordance with MCLA 600.3241, in which case the redemption period shall be 1 month, or under MCL 600.3241a 30 days from the date of such sale, or 15 days from the MCL 600.3241a (b) notice, whichever is later, or extinguished pursuant to MCL 600.3238. If the property is sold at foreclosure sale under Chapter 32 of the Revised Judicature Act of 1961, pursuant to MCL 600.3278 the borrower will be held responsible to the person who buys the property at the mortgage foreclosure sale or to the mortgage holder for damaging the property during the redemption period. ATTENTION HOMEOWNER: If you are a military service member on active duty, if your period of active duty has concluded less than 90 days ago, or if you have been ordered to active duty, please contact the attorney for the party foreclosing the mortgage at the telephone number stated in this notice ATTENTION PURCHASERS: This sale may be rescinded by the foreclosing mortgagee. In that event, your damages, if any, shall be limited solely to the return of the bid amount tendered at sale, plus interest. This notice is from a debt collector. Dated: December 22, 2025, For more information, please call: (513) 852-6066 Daniel A. Cox Wood + Lamping, LLP Attorneys for Servicer 600 Vine Street, Suite 2500, Cincinnati, OH 45202 File 25-11065 (01-03)(01-24)

FORECLOSURE NOTICE (ALL COUNTIES) AS A DEBT COLLECTOR, WE ARE ATTEMPTING TO COLLECT A DEBT AND ANY INFORMATION OBTAINED WILL BE USED FOR THAT PURPOSE. ATTENTION HOMEOWNER: IF YOU ARE A MILITARY SERVICE MEMBER ON ACTIVE DUTY, IF YOUR PERIOD OF ACTIVE DUTY HAS CONCLUDED LESS THAN 90 DAYS AGO, OR IF YOU HAVE BEEN ORDERED TO ACTIVE DUTY, PLEASE CONTACT THE ATTORNEY FOR THE PARTY FORECLOSING THE MORTGAGE AT THE TELEPHONE NUMBER STATED IN THIS NOTICE. Notice of Foreclosure by Advertisement – Notice is given under section 3212 of the revised judicature act of 1961, 1961 PA 236, MCL 600.3212, that the following mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at a public auction sale to the highest bidder for cash or cashier's check at the place of holding the circuit court in Cass County, starting promptly at 10:00 AM a.m./p.m. on January 21, 2026. The amount due on the mortgage may be greater on the day of the sale. Placing the highest bid at the sale does not automatically entitle the purchaser to free and clear ownership of the property. A potential purchaser is encouraged to contact the county register of deeds office or a title insurance company, either of which may charge a fee for this information. Default having been made in the terms and conditions of a certain mortgage made by Eddie L Adkins, and Paula L Adkins of Cass County, Michigan, Mortgagor to Notre Dame Federal Credit Union dated the 9th day of February, 2022, and recorded in the office of the Register of Deeds, for the County of Cass and State of Michigan, on the 18th day of November, 2025, Liber 1268, Page 2039, of the Cass County Records on which mortgage there is claimed to be due, at the date of this notice, for principal of $36,267.38 plus accrued interest at 7.50000% percent per annum. Which said premises are described as follows: All that certain piece or parcel of land situated in the Township of Milton, in the County of Cass and State of Michigan and described as follows to wit: Part of the Northeast 1/4 of Section 14. Town 8 South, Range 16 West, described as: Beginning at the North 1/4 comer of Section 14; thence South 89 degrees 56` 00" East along the North line of said Section 249.00 feel; thence South 0 degrees 04` 00" West at right angles to said North line 327.00 feet; thence North 89 degrees 56` 00" West 248.60 feet to the North and South 1/4 line of said Section; thence North along said 1/4 line 327.00 feet to the point of beginning. Being subject to that portion along the North and West sides thereof as being used for highway purposes. Commonly known as: 70051 Brush Road, Niles, MI 49120 Tax ID: 14-070-014-003-50 If the property is sold at a foreclosure sale the borrower, pursuant to MCLA 600.3278 will be held responsible to the person who buys the property at the mortgage foreclosure sale or to the mortgage holder for damaging the property during the redemption period. The redemption period shall be six months from the date of such sale, unless determined abandoned in accordance with MCL 600.3241a, in which case the redemption period shall be 30 days from the date of such sale. Dated: December 20, 2025 By: Benjamin N. Hoen #P-81415 Weltman, Weinberg & Reis Co., L.P.A. 5990 West Creek Road, Suite 200 Independence, OH 44131 Telephone: 216-739-5100 Fax: 216-363-4034 Email: bhoen@weltman.com WWR#: 25-000827-1. (12-20)(01-10)

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Photo provided / Steve Frappier

A barred owl on Dec. 16 at the home of Steve and Linda Frappier of St. Joseph.

Barred owl stops by for the day

A barred owl stopped by the home of Steve and Linda Frappier of St. Joseph on Dec. 16. Steve Frappier reported the owl stayed all day in his backyard.

Barred owls favor unbroken forest tracts, especially swamp forests, and I believe the owl that visited the Frappiers' yard ventured away from the nearby floodplain forest of Hickory Creek where it normally resides. By looking at the photo of the owl I see the bird enjoying basking in the sun.

Jonathan Wuepper
Southwest Michigan Wildlife

The barred owl gets its name from the vertical bars, or stripes, seen on the bird's chest. Both male and female look similar. The species is non-migratory, present throughout the year over most of the eastern U.S. and southern Canada.

A fox sparrow has been present for the past few weeks at the home of Brad and Hannah Anderson of Bridgman. The fox sparrow is named due to the red and gray feathers present, resembling those colors found on foxes.

The fox sparrow has many subspecies. The common subspecies which migrates through Michigan breeds in the coniferous forests of northeastern Canada and primarily winters in the southeastern U.S. A few fox sparrows occasionally overwinter in southern Michigan, such as the one present in Anderson's yard.

On average, the first fox sparrow in the fall is reported in Berrien County by Oct. 7. Peak migration takes place during the third and fourth weeks in October. Most southbound migrant fox sparrows have departed by Nov. 20.

Northbound fox sparrows usually arrive locally in early March, with peak migration occurring March 25 and April 20. Most northbound fox sparrows have departed southern Michigan by late April, but a few lingering individuals may be present until mid-May.

Anderson also photographed a red-headed woodpecker on Dec. 16 at Warren Dunes State Park. Anderson's observation occurred during the New Buffalo area Christmas Bird Census, sponsored by the National Audubon Society and the Berrien Birding Club.

Photo provided / Brad Anderson

A red-headed woodpecker on Dec. 16 at Warren Dunes State Park.

Red-headed woodpeckers are uncommon summer residents across Michigan. Most red-headed-woodpeckers depart the state for the winter months, but in years when the crop of acorns and beechnuts are plenty, many of them stay the entire winter.

This winter I have seen red-headed woodpeckers along Crystal Springs Street in Pokagon Township in Cass County, where there is an ample supply of acorns produced by oak trees.

Jonathan Wuepper is an area naturalist. Report your sightings to him at wuepperj@gmail.com

Photo provided / Brad Anderson

A fox sparrow on Dec. 11 in Bridgman.

Sarett Nature Center

Sarett Nature Stewards: 2-4 p.m. each Wednesday. This program is a way to experience Sarett in a whole different way. By being a nature steward you are helping Sarett but you also gain a sense of well-being. Sarett's crew will teach you many different skills such as collecting viable seeds for future planting, how to identify invasive species from native ones, removing invasive plants, and more. For ages 10 and older.

Winter Bird Quest: 8 a.m.-noon Jan. 17. Join Sarett for winter birding around Berrien County, visiting a few of the best winter hot-spots to find a variety of birds visiting us for the winter. Call (269) 927-4832 to register. Members $10, Non-members $15.

Grand Mere State Park

Volunteer Stewardship Workday: 10 a.m.-noon on Jan. 10. Park along Grand Mere Road, near the intersection of Grand Mere Road and Thornton Drive. Volunteers are needed to help remove woody invasive species in the beautiful lake plain prairie at Grand Mere State Park. Join us on a beautiful hike and help reclaim the native habitat that makes this area thrive. Volunteers will learn to identify invasive shrubs before cutting them down. All equipment will be provided. Long pants, long shirts and closed-toed shoes are highly recommended.

Email info for Get Outdoors to sports@TheHP.com, or call 429-1294 by Monday.

Wisconsin town rallies around pelican that mysteriously didn't migrate south

By BOB TIMMONS
Star Tribune (TNS)

Like the gales of Lake Superior, migratory birds sweep in every fall, then blow out of town along the northern shores of Ashland, Wis.

This season, a rangy American white pelican changed up the migratory routine for reasons that weren't immediately clear – and got this lake town invested in its fate.

The water bird that should have been somewhere on the Gulf Coast stuck around into December. It won hearts, it left wildlife specialists curious, and it held a disturbing secret that made the wayward visitor the symbol of a conservation message.

"A local celebrity, almost a mascot," is how Seth Carpenter, the local newspaper editor, described the white pelican with a wingspan that rivals NBA stars.

By Christmas, the pelican had long left the shore, not under its own power. But it continues to hold Ashland's attention, said Carpenter, who edits the Daily Press, as the bird convalesces 160 miles away at a wildlife rehabilitation center in Antigo, Wis.

Nothing stood out when the pelican arrived with a flock in early September.

In Ashland, the striking birds with the 9-foot wingspans and basket-like jawlines historically stop along the Lake Superior inlet of Chequamegon Bay.

Early this October, however, one appeared in a prominent spot again and again, finding a captive audience at the rocks along Maslowski Beach. The beach gets steady traffic from people who stop to fill water containers at an artesian well.

The bird became recognizable – and was recognizably alone for waterfowl that are social and normally seen in groups.

"It really became a kind of fixture," said Ryan Brady, a Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources conservation biologist, who works in Ashland.

The community buzzed on social media and on the street as October deepened and other pelicans moved on. Brady, who has been in Ashland since 1995, crossed paths with people who had questions or comments.

Have you seen the pelican? Why do you think it's still here?

By appearances, Brady said, the bird was normal: preening, swimming, flying to different parts of the bay. Witnessing its energy, he assumed it was eating, too.

Thanksgiving week brought a snowstorm and plummeting temperatures that began to seal the bay with ice. Brady thought freeze-up would be the final straw.

"My fingers were crossed that maybe it was gone," said the biologist. But he was concerned enough to keep looking for the bird.

On Dec. 3, Brady spotted a flash of white in the open water at the upper end of the bay. The bird tried unsuccessfully to perch on pilings encased in ice. Finally, it swam toward the edge of the shore as signs of distress emerged, Brady said.

Parts of its wings had iced up. The bird waddled unexpectedly off the shore to higher ground.

Brady used a long-handled net to capture the bird, which he said barely struggled. Secured in a pet crate, it was transported across northern Wisconsin to the Raptor Education Group Inc., a wildlife rehabilitation facility.

The center's director, Marge Gibson, quickly figured out why the bird lingered: Someone shot it.

Lead birdshot had torn through the bone and tissue of the pelican's long bill. An X-ray showed a pellet embedded in its neck, too, and other wounds.

Its shooting, coupled with the effects of lead poisoning, could explain why the bird stayed so long in Ashland and also why it was underweight when it was captured, she said. The bird was starving.

White pelicans range in weight from 11 to 20 pounds, with males generally heavier then females. The pelican weighed about 8 pounds when captured. REGI later determined the bird is female.

"It is so hard when birds are shot," she added. "The skin seals, and feathers cover. You often can't see it."

The bird's webbed feet were frostbitten even though, like other waterfowl, they have circulatory systems that allow them to spend long periods in icy water. The bird could lose some tissue, she said.

Like Brady, Gibson was mindful of the bird long before it needed help. She and the DNR biologist had communicated. She said the bird did a good job of masking its deteriorating health.

"He was still able to fly some," Gibson said. "People were very excited to see him because he was unusual. He played into that."

The bird joins a list of 23 other birds with gunshot wounds that have arrived at REGI this year, Gibson said. REGI had to euthanize several white pelicans brought in from the Oshkosh, Wis., area.

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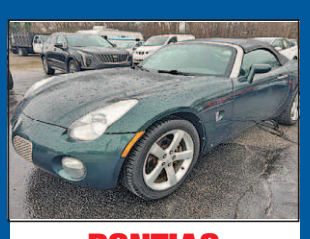

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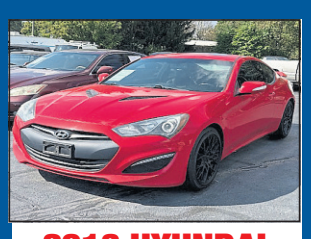

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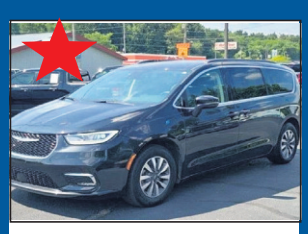

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